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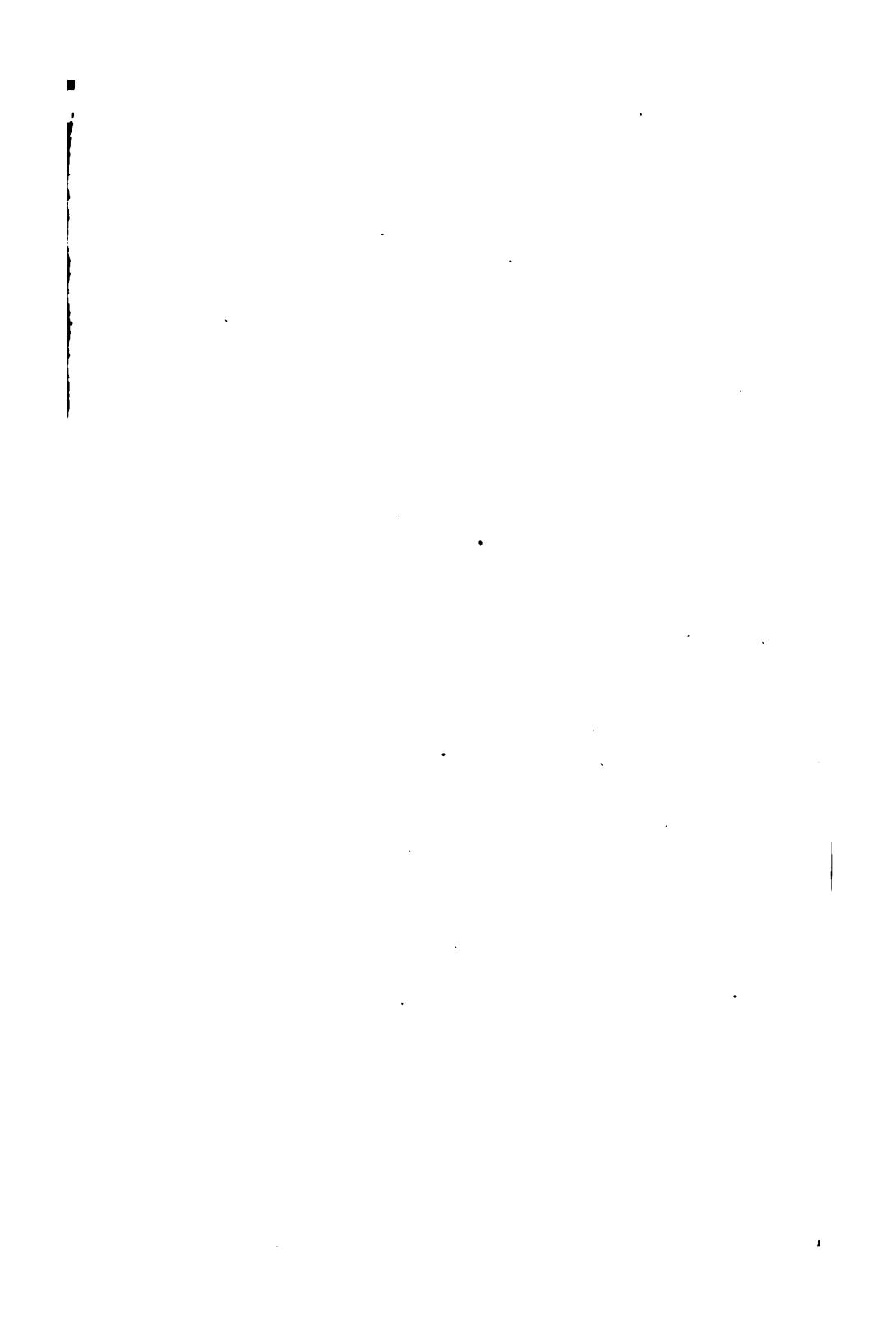
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MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

VOL. III.



MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

A Novel.

BY LEGH KNIGHT,
AUTHOR OF "TONIC BITTERS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



SECOND EDITION.

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MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

CHAPTER I

IN spite of Sissie's promise to give Arnold a decided answer in a fortnight, at the farthest, from the time they had parted, she was obliged to let more than a week elapse before she proceeded with her search, as she feared that Clement might run some risk of a relapse, if he again travelled before he had quite recovered his strength, and she could not leave him at Cover-heath without Phœbe. During this period of unavoidable inaction, Sissie had much to think of, and much to arrange in her own mind. Clement's illness, and the unexpected meeting with Arnold, had so entirely occupied her thoughts

ever since she left Heidelberg, that she had had no time till now to review the progress she had made in her self-assigned task. There could no longer be any doubt that she was, at last, on the right track. Having positive evidence that Henry Monk was living with his wife and child at Clifton, under the name of Morris, in June, 1837, she had now only to find out what had become of that wife and child, after his death in the August of the same year. It appeared unlikely that she could meet with any great difficulty in this, and when she started for Clifton, nine days after parting from Arnold, she had little doubt of getting through her work in time to fulfil her promise to him.

She spent three days at Clifton, however, without being able to discover that any one of the name of Morris had lived there at any time between 1832 and 1837. Thus disengaged, and fancying that the place where

Henry Monk had died might afford some better clue, Sissie then went off to Yarmouth. Here she was much more fortunate. Her first visit was to the churchyard, where her cousin was buried. The inscription on his tomb was, "To the memory of Henry Maurice Monk;" but a very little close examination of the letters showed that the name had originally stood as "Henry Morris," and that the present inscription was a correction of the original one. Sissie applied to the sexton for an explanation of this peculiarity, and learnt from him that a few months after the tombstone had been erected, a gentleman, who represented himself as the brother of the deceased, had got the inscription altered in the manner which she had noticed. The man remembered this fact well, from there having been considerable trouble about the matter, but he could remember none of the circumstances as to the erection of the original stone.

After some delay, however, he referred Sissie to a surgeon of the name of Hunton, who had a considerable practice amongst the sea-faring population of the town. This Mr. Hunton had, not many months before, sent a stranger to the churchyard, who made similar inquiries as to the change in the inscription, and Mr. Hunton might, therefore, be supposed to remember something about the first erection of the stone.

Mr. Hunton's memory proved all that Sissie could desire. Something sailor-like in his appearance and manner at once set her at her ease with him, and she had no difficulty in getting the information she wanted. To her first question whether he could give her any particulars of the death of Henry Monk, or Morris, he replied, "It is extremely fortunate that you have been directed to me, for I believe I am about the only person living who could give you those particulars."

"Then you probably attended him in his last illness?" said Sissie.

"I will tell you all about it," returned the sailor-surgeon. "You know, perhaps, how suddenly he died?"

"I have heard that he died suddenly."

"Let me see—it was in '37—I was in the West India Mail Packet Company at that time. My mother was living here—had lived here all her life; and not being so well off as we could have wished, poor soul, she used to let part of her house in lodgings to the visitors who flock here in the summer. That summer I had come with the intention of taking her to live with a sister at Plymouth, before I went to sea again—for she was getting too old and infirm to be left so much alone. She was to give up her house at quarter-day—the September quarter—but I had to sail before that, and we had settled that I should take her to Plymouth at the beginning of

September, and leave her there. Somewhere near the end of August a young man came after the lodgings. Mother told him how she was situated, but he said he only wanted to stay a fortnight, so she agreed to let to him for that time, and the next day he brought his wife and child. I remember well how my dear old mother talked that evening about the good-looking young couple, and their pretty little boy. The next morning early the young man went out to bathe. Just as he left the house the child ran after him, begging to be taken too. My mother used afterwards to cry whenever she spoke of the way the poor fellow said, 'Not to-day, my darling,' and then kissed the boy, and looked up at the window and kissed his hand to his little wife. The bathing-place was not more than a stone's throw from our house, and the young man hadn't been gone many minutes, when I saw from the looks of the passers-by that there was

something the matter down there. I hurried out, and on the shore I found my mother's new lodger lying dead—not drowned, for though he died in the water, he was pulled out directly he was seen to sink. It was heart-disease, which must have killed him before long under the best of circumstances. You may judge what it was to break it to the poor delicate little wife ! But all our care was in vain ; the shock was too much for her ; and, after giving birth to a dead child, her mind became quite disordered. My good mother could not leave the poor creature in this condition—with not a friend, or even an acquaintance in the place—so I was obliged to join my ship without having seen the old lady in her new home, and she stayed at Yarmouth till the poor thing was able to be moved."

"Where was she moved to?" asked Sissie, as Mr. Hunton paused.

"That is more than I can say. The

young couple did not mention where they came from, at first ; and, after her husband's death, the poor little wife remembered nothing. I recollect my mother telling me, when I saw her at Plymouth the next year, that the only way she had to find out anything about them was from the little boy ; but I cannot recollect where it was that she left them, a good distance from Yarmouth, I know, and I don't think it was far out of my mother's road to Plymouth."

"Was it Clifton ?" asked Sissie.

"Well, I believe it was. Yes, I am sure it was—for now I remember my mother imitating the pretty way in which the child said, 'Cliff-ton.'"

"Your mother did not mention whether she left the young widow with any friends, I suppose?"

"She said she seemed to have some attached friends, and would be well taken care of. She was still quite incapable of

taking care of herself, when my mother left her."

"Do you know who put up the tomb-stone?"

"I had it put up—feeling sure that the widow would wish it, if she could answer for herself. But it seems we were wrong in the name, for the sexton tells me that a few months afterwards a gentleman came, and had it changed. When the poor fellow died so suddenly, the only thing to help me in finding out his friends was a letter signed 'Rupert Monk,' and dated from a place called Monk's Own, in Yorkshire. I wrote to this address, giving an account of the sad occurrence, but no answer came before I left Yarmouth. It seems now that this Rupert Monk was the brother of the dead man."

"Yes," said Sissie, "he was."

"Strangely enough, a gentleman came here a month or so ago, making just the

same enquiries that you are making. I was away at the time, but he saw my wife, who referred him to the sexton."

"Could that have been the son?" asked Sissie, breathlessly.

"I think not. I fancy the son would have claimed me as an old friend—that is, if either he or his mother had any remembrance of all that happened here. My dear old mother died the year after she moved to Plymouth, or I might have been able to give you more information. Of course, being so frequently away from England, I could not make any attempt to renew so slight an acquaintance. It is only within the last year that I have made my settled home here."

As Mr. Hunton was quite certain that his mother had taken Mrs. Morris back to the place whence she had come to Yarmouth, Sissie soon decided that her best plan would be to return at once to Clifton, and renew

the search there. It was now a fortnight from the time she had parted with Arnold, and she did not seem much nearer success than she was then. She got back to Clifton on Saturday night, and another day must therefore pass without any further progress. Sissie had never felt so impatient as she did during this Sunday, when she knew that Arnold must be blaming her for her breach of faith, and she yet was uncertain how long it might be before she would be able to redeem her promise. She had heard from her father that the whole party had returned to Cover-heath. It would be impossible for her to join them there until her task was entirely finished.

Sissie was thinking thus, as she rested in the graveyard of a village church not far from Clifton, to which she and Clément had strolled on the Sunday afternoon, when her brother roused her from her reverie by the observation, "There is the name of Morris,

Sissie—if you want to find it—on that tombstone over there.”

Sissie was not so keen-sighted as Clement, so she had to move before she could see the name on the tombstone to which he pointed. When she did see it, she felt that an apparent chance had led her at once to the end of her search. There were few words on the stone, but to Sissie those few words were eloquent of relief, rest, and hope. And yet the simple record made her heart ache with pity for the wife and mother, whose history she had now traced, almost step by step, from her father’s death-bed in her native land, to this remote grave in a foreign country. The words which closed the story were these :—“ Here lie the remains of Maria Morris, who died August 9th, 1850, aged 35 years. And of her son Harry Ernest, found drowned in the Avon, August 1st, 1850, aged 17 years.”

After reading this, it needed little im-

agation to piece together all that must have gone before. The young widow's return from Yarmouth, in the condition of mental prostration which Mr. Hunton had described—the years during which mourning for the lost husband had probably been gradually lightened by the mother's love for the child who was left to her—then the terrible affliction of that child's sad death, just as he was of an age to be a comfort to her—and the enfeebled mind and body sinking beneath this second blow, probably having never entirely recovered from the first.

Sissie's first *selfish* thought was that before another day had passed she would be able to answer Arnold so as to satisfy his most sanguine hopes. Her next feeling was one of compunction for having so wronged her father, who had doubtless long known of Harry Monk's untimely death, but had been too proud to defend himself from

his children's unjust suspicions. She remembered how he had again and again asserted that no nearer heir to Monk's Own than himself was in existence. Under the influence of this feeling Sissie hastily left the churchyard, and began to walk rapidly back to Clifton. She would start for home that very night, and would not rest till she had begged her father's forgiveness for her unnatural and cruel doubt of his integrity. She had grown so used to this doubt during the last year, that she did not know how heavily it weighed till she felt how great was the relief of its removal. This relief, and the thought of Arnold's impatience for his promised answer, gave such wings to Sissie's feet, that Clement had hard work to keep pace with her.

"Was that the little boy you have been looking for, Sissie?" asked Clement, at last.
"I am so sorry if he is dead."

"Yes, dear," answered Sissie, absently.

"How do you know he is dead?" pursued Clement.

Sissie stopped. *Did* she know he was dead? Was this tombstone sufficient evidence that she had reached the goal of her search? At any rate she had better learn more particulars before she concluded that the Maria Morris and her son who lay buried here were really the widow and child of Henry Monk. She therefore retraced her steps, and enquired for the sexton.

"Maria Morris," the old man repeated, in answer to her question about the tombstone. "Well, I can't rightly say for certain whose tombstone that is. There are a many Morrises and a many Marias—not in the village, though, for Morris ain't a name hereabouts. Son found drowned, eh? Ah, that's another thing, miss. My memory ain't what it was, but I reckon my old woman can tell you something about that. Here, Jane! Here's a lady wants to know

about that there stone to the young gentleman as was found drowned—right-hand corner, near the big yew."

"Dear, dear, miss," began the wife, coming bustling forward, with evident delight in the sad story she had to tell. "That was a bad business, and though I didn't know the poor body myself—not to speak to—I remember all about it, as if it was only yesterday it all happened."

"How did it happen?" asked Sissie.

"The lady died of a broken heart, miss; and the young gentleman—you know about him, miss?" with a mysterious lowering of the voice.

"He was drowned, was he not?"

"*Found drowned*—they brought it in." This was said still more mysteriously, and Sissie began to tremble with an undefined fear.

"There was a coroner's inquest, I suppose?"

"Yes, miss. But they couldn't bring it home to him that done it, because the poor mother was out of her senses, and no one else had caught more than a peep at him—not enough to swear by."

"I don't understand," Sissie faltered.
"Was not the boy's death an accident?"

"Not it, miss—there was foul play there, and so everybody said. It was all in the paper, miss, and in some of the great London papers, too."

"Was the mother a widow?" asked Sissie.

"Nobody knew what to think about that. She always wore black, I have heard say, but no cap. She was often very low in her spirits, poor thing. Some do think it was the boy's father made away with him; but that don't seem hardly natural, do it, miss?"

Sissie saw that her work was not so nearly finished as she had hoped. She must find

out all the circumstances attending the boy's death, before she could be sure whether or not he was Henry Monk's son. As the sexton's wife knew nothing more than she had already told, and no one else in the village knew anything, Sissie returned to Clifton, with the view of consulting the paper which was said to have given an account of the inquest. After a sleepless night, she was at the principal stationer's as the shutters were taken down, and it was not long before she found what she sought. In a paper, dated August 6th, 1850, the following paragraph occurred : "An inquest was held yesterday, at the Bull Inn, on the body of a youth, aged seventeen years, which was found in the Avon on the 3rd, and identified by several persons as that of a lad of weak intellect, named Harry Morris, who resided with his mother at A—. John Jones deposed to having taken the body out of the river near Clifton. Sarah

Isherwood, the landlady of the house in which the deceased lived, deposed that on the afternoon of the 1st, a gentleman had visited the boy's mother, and after remaining an hour or two in the house, had taken the boy out with him. Neither had returned. The mother had shown great anxiety. Hearing on the 4th that a body had been taken out of the river, the witness had gone to Clifton, and identified the corpse as that of Harry Morris. The mother was too ill to appear. There being no evidence to prove how the lad got into the river, a verdict was returned of 'found drowned.'"

After reading this account, Sissie felt a feverish eagerness to sift the matter to the bottom. She therefore drove at once to A— and made enquiries for Sarah Isherwood, who, she soon learned, had gone to live in Bristol. The name, being an uncommon one, was traced without any difficulty, and

Sissie was quickly in possession of all the known and surmised facts of the case.

Mrs. Morris had come to live in Mrs. Isherwood's house at A—— in the spring of 1850. She was still pretty and young-looking, but seemed to have had some great trial, which had quite broken her spirit. She never mentioned her husband, but she wore a wedding-ring, and, though she always dressed in black, had no sign of widowhood about her. The boy used to say that he did not remember his father. Neither mother nor son ever talked of their former life, or mentioned any friends or relations. They were devoted to each other, and never seemed happy apart. The boy was small for his age, and not strong, either in body or mind; and that might have been the reason that he did not care to associate with companions of his own age. Nobody ever visited them till they had been at A—— about six months, when a gentleman

came to the door, and asked for Mrs. Morris. Mrs. Isherwood did not know what passed during his visit; but in about two hours he went away, accompanied by young Harry, and they were talking together merrily as they left the house. The stranger said, as he went out, that he should be back in an hour. The landlady did not see the boy again till, three days later, she recognised the corpse found in the Avon. The stranger never returned. Mrs. Morris was attacked with brain fever soon after hearing of her son's fate; and from that time till her death—a week later—she never ceased to moan out the words—“Murdered! murdered!” Mrs. Isherwood had herself no doubt that the boy was murdered. A young man who had sailed from Bristol in a merchant vessel the day Harry Morris was first missed, had seen through a telescope a scuffle on the shore between a boy and a man, and had seen the

boy fall into the river. This had not come out at the inquest, as the young man only returned to Bristol three years after the supposed murder had taken place. She thought she should know the stranger again. He was a man about forty, slight and dark, with very handsome eyes; and she particularly remembered his voice, because she had not herself opened the door to him, but had heard him speak, and had been so struck with the tone, that she had purposely kept in the way to see him as he went out again.

"Do you remember whether his eyes were blue or black?" asked Sissie, trying to shake off the horror which was creeping over her.

"Yes, I do remember, as it happens," returned Mrs. Isherwood. "They were brown; and I will tell you how I remember. My daughter, who opened the door to him, was engaged to be married at

the time ; and she and her young man had a few words that very same evening, because she admired the stranger's eyes, and poor Joe's eyes were blue. Dear, dear ! and Joe and her baby are both gone now ! I remember her saying blue eyes were so meaningless, and the stranger's eyes were full of meaning. I have often thought of her words since, when I have seen brown eyes. I thought of them only this minute, when the young gentleman there looked up at me. His are just the eyes my poor girl thought so much of."

A deadly feeling of sickness came over Sissie, but she managed to ask if Mrs. Morris had left any clothes, or other property ; and she carefully examined the things which were shown to her—not many, but all very nice and delicate in material and make. The poor lady might have been a foreigner, Mrs. Isherwood thought. She did not speak quite like

other people. No one had enquired after her or the boy until now. The expense of their burial had been paid out of the small sum of ready money which had been left in the poor lady's purse. She never received any letters. She never read, and had no books, excepting the boy's lesson books. Harry was fair and delicate-looking, very small for his age—"a good deal like your young gentleman, miss, only older," added Mrs. Isherwood; and Sissie sank into a chair, her trembling legs being no longer able to support her.

She could ask no more—seek no farther. An unutterable horror had risen up before her, and she could neither pass nor confront it. She dared not advance another step in the way she had been going. She dared not think of what she might already have been the means of bringing to light. As soon as she had regained a little strength and composure, she drove back to Bristol;

and from thence took the first train—not in the direction of Cover-heath, but in that of Monk's Own. Clement's questions were unheeded, and the boy was at last obliged to content himself with holding a whispered conversation with Phœbe; only occasionally stealing awe-struck glances at his sister's face, which looked to him as ghastly and rigid as marble.

CHAPTER II.

ON reaching Monk's Own, Sissie's first act was to send Clement with a note to Mrs. Rupert, begging that good friend to keep the boy at the Rectory for a few days, and intimating that she herself would rather be without visitors at present. Then she sat down to write to Arnold. To her father she could not write ; but her letter to Arnold would give him the necessary information as to her whereabouts. The writing of this letter was the hardest task she had ever yet had to accomplish. One attempt after another was torn up, as saying too much, or too little ; and, at last, she was obliged to be contented with the follow-

ing curt, and apparently heartless note—apparently heartless, because coming from a heart so nearly broken as to be incapable of anything more than a stolid endurance of suffering which was too deep to be spoken of.

"Monk's Own, September 9th.

"MY DEAR ARNOLD,

"I cannot fulfil the promise I made to you last Saturday fortnight, and you must never ask me why. For pity's sake do not ask me that. Nothing now can ever make it possible for me to give you the answer I promised then; and it will be better for us both never to meet again. You will not believe that in writing this I suffer quite as much as you can in reading it; but it is so. Will you let my father know that I am here? I dare not ask you to forgive me, or to believe me to be, as I am,

"Your true friend,

"SISSIE MONK."

When this letter was despatched Sissie could think of nothing but the effect it would have upon Arnold. The belief in her father's guilt was more like a nightmare dream than a waking reality. The horror seemed to paralyse her, and make her powerless either to dispel, or to realise it. But the thought of Arnold, and his lost love, was an ever-present, ever-sensible pain. Sometimes—especially in the long, sleepless nights—the temptation would arise to disregard her own terrible suspicions, to shut her ears to the voice of conscience, and to answer Arnold as she would have answered had she never seen the grave at A——. When she did not love him, she had thought her father's concealed knowledge of his own bad title to Monk's Own a sufficient cause for rejecting Arnold; but she had long ago decided that if he still loved her as he formerly did this need not stand between them. Since the meeting on the

Rhine, she no longer doubted the strength of Arnold's love ; and her wish to find the real heir before acknowledging how fully she returned that love, had been merely a fancy inspired by the near prospect of success. Why should this new barrier be more impassable than the former one ? Why should she not make Arnold and herself happy, and forget what would never be known unless she betrayed it ? But this temptation seldom lasted more than a few minutes. The honesty which was Arnold's strongest characteristic made the idea of any concealment from him too base to be entertained ; and the idea of confessing to him her suspicions was equally inadmissible. Poor Sissie's strong, practical mind was little used to the agony of such conflicting emotions as now harassed it. At one moment she thought the greatest pain she could have to suffer would be a meeting with Arnold ; the next moment she felt that to see him once more

would be something like happiness, even if he only came to reproach her.

Two days after her return home, Arnold did come, entering the room abruptly, as Sissie was absently looking at her untasted breakfast. She started to her feet with a low cry, and then, sinking back into her chair, covered her face with her hands. She could not stand the burning indignation in those eyes, which had always before looked so tenderly at her.

“This is unbearable,” said Arnold, coming close up to her, and holding out the note she had sent to him. “Do you think it possible that anything would make me stay away after this. I demand an explanation ; I have a right to demand it.” He was trying to speak in a very firm tone, but he could not control the tremor in his voice.

Sissie uncovered her white face, shook her head, and moved her lips, but no sound came.

Arnold continued: "Is it fair,—is it honest,—is it justifiable to treat me as you have done? You know well that for two years I have loved you so deeply that I have had no hope in life but that of gaining your love in ~~return~~. Twice you honestly told me that this could not be, and I accepted my disappointment without a murmur. But now you have not been honest; you have given me false hopes—you have led me on to believe that at last my devotion had won some return—and then, at the very time when, through your own promise, I was expecting the fulfilment of the hope which is more to me than life, I get this"— giving an indignant blow to the note which he held in his hand.

"Spare me," Sissie's pale lips at last faltered out.

"Spare you!" cried Arnold, still vehemently angry. "How have you spared me? Do you know at all what love is?

Do you know what it is for a man to have set his whole heart on a woman, and when she has fooled him into the hope of having won her, for her to dash all his hopes to the ground at one blow, and coolly tell him that he must ask for no explanation."

All the time Arnold was speaking, Sissie had gazed at him in a kind of trance. She had known that he must be very angry with her; she acknowledged that his indignation was most just, and she knew that she was powerless to defend herself. Having, therefore, passively accepted the position—feeling that she must not say one word to lighten his grief, or her own reproach—her sole desire now was to take the fullest advantage of this last opportunity of imprinting upon her memory every word and look of Arnold's, that in the long, desolate years to come, the remembrance of his words and looks might remain with her, though he should be for ever absent from

her. In the midst of his anger, this wistful, hopeless gaze smote Arnold to the heart, and he suddenly threw himself on the ground at Sissie's feet, exclaiming passionately, "Forgive me, Sissie! do not look like that! I will not say another word of reproach. Only tell me that it is all a mistake! Tell me that I need not give up hope! I will go back to Cover-heath,—I will not see you for years,—I will never breathe a word of love, if you will say that some day I may hope again, that some day you will try again to love me, as you once promised you would try! Sissie! Sissie! you cannot be so cold! You must have some feeling! You must be a little moved by such misery as mine! It would be better for me that you should take a knife from that table, and plunge it into my heart, than that you should take from me all that makes my life worth having. Oh, Sissie, mine is no common love! I am not

boasting. It is my misfortune, not my merit. If you send me from you now, I shall never be the same man I was before—my life will be blighted till my dying day. One word, Sissie, only one little word! Just say ‘Hope,’ and I will wait patiently for more, year after year, till we are both grey-headed, if you like. Only say, ‘Hope,’ Sissie ?”

Sissie shook her head.

“ You cannot say that you could ever love me ?”

No answer, by word or look.

“ You are certain that you could never love me ?”

Still no answer.

“ You would rather never see me again ?” asked Arnold, in the hoarse voice which tells of intolerable pain; as he sprang to his feet.

“ Yes,” answered Sissie, distinctly, having summoned up all her resolution to say

something which should end this torturing scene.

"So be it, then," returned Arnold, the words coming out slowly from between his set teeth. "Good-bye—for ever." He said no more, but remained standing, with his lips firmly closed, and his eyes fixed upon Sissie, who continued to gaze at him in the same wrapt manner as before, though the sight of his ghastly look of suffering was more painful to her than all the rest. At last Arnold slowly left the room, and as the door closed behind him, Sissie felt that, as Arnold had said of himself, a blight had fallen upon her life, from which it could never again be free.

She sat for hours as Arnold had left her, without shedding a tear or moving a muscle, till, at last, the instinct of self-preservation roused her from this stupor, and induced her to try and escape from her thoughts by active exercise. As she went

into her own room to fetch her hat and cloak, she found that her maid had begun to unpack a trunk which had been sent from Cover-heath. The contents were scattered over the floor, and conspicuous amongst them was "Murray's Handbook for the Rhine." Mechanically she took the book in her hand, and it opened at the part over which she and Arnold had often pored together,—especially on that happy day when they travelled from Coblenz to Cologne. Arnold had made a few little pencilled sketches on the margin of some of the pages, and at the sight of these the bright scenes of that time came back to her with such vivid reality, and in such striking contrast with the present, that, at last, the right chord was touched, and a flood of tears came to her relief.

As, towards evening, Sissie was walking rapidly to and fro under the trees in a corner of the park that was little frequented,

she perceived Lucy coming towards her. Sissie made an effort to appear the same as usual, but she soon saw that Lucy was herself too much excited to notice any signs of emotion in her companion.

"I know you have forbidden us to come to you, Sissie," she began hurriedly, "and I should not have forced my way into the house. But I was very anxious to speak to you, and catching sight of you through the trees; I could not resist coming to you here. What have you been doing to Arnold Preston?"

"Doing to Arnold?" repeated Sissie, too thoroughly beaten to be even surprised at Lucy's abrupt question.

"Yes. Lottie and I met him this morning on the road to the railway, and I hardly knew him, he was so changed; he looked like an old man. I asked him where he was going, and he answered quite wildly, 'Away somewhere—no matter where—to the Antipodes, I believe!' and then he rushed on,

as if he hardly knew us. Uncle Walter says he saw him come in here about an hour before, so I know that it is all your fault, Sissie."

"Yes, it is all my fault," returned Sissie, meekly.

"It is too bad! You have been playing fast and loose with that poor fellow ever since he first came here, and now you have succeeded in breaking his heart!"

"And my own, too," said Sissie, in a tone of calm despair.

"Why do you do it, then, Sissie?" asked Lucy, slightly relenting at the sight of her cousin's evident unhappiness. "Surely you are not so mean as to reject him because he is poor, when you have enough for both?"

"No, that is not it," answered Sissie, in the same spiritless manner as before.

"You surely do not care more for any one else! I am certain you loved him when he was engaged to Sophie Rice."

"Yes, I did, and I do still," assented Sissie, with the unnatural calmness which always tells of pent-up passion. Then suddenly the passion burst all bounds, and exclaiming, "Love him!—oh, Lucy, I cannot live without him!" she leant her head against a tree, and sobbed violently.

"It is only some misunderstanding, then!" cried Lucy, eagerly. "You have had a quarrel, which a word would make up? Sissie! let me write to him at once, and tell him to come back to you. Don't both make yourselves miserable for nothing."

"No, Lucy, there has been no quarrel. We understand each other only too well. There is no hope for either of us. I shall be true to him all my life, and I believe that he will be true to me, but we can never see each other again."

"Sissie, this is dreadful! It is like some horrid mystery in a novel."

"It must remain a mystery, Lucy. Will

you be my friend, and help me to bear a grief which is heavier than you can possibly conceive? Will you promise to tell no one what I have said now, and to do what you can to put a stop to any speculations about me?"

"I will do all I can to help you, dearest Sissie," answered Lucy, subdued and melted by Sissie's confidence.

"You love Arnold, too," murmured Sissie, almost inaudibly.

"No, not now," returned Lucy. "I was foolish enough to fancy so, once—though I knew all the time that he would never care for any one but you. But I have got over that fancy now. I like him better than any man I ever saw, but I do not love him."

"I envy you," began Sissie, slowly. "No!" she exclaimed, raising her head and standing erect, with a sudden glow on her pale cheeks, and a bright light in her heavy

eyes, "I do not envy you! I would rather break my heart for love of him, than never have learnt to be worthy of his love for me!"

Lucy looked rather awe-struck at Sissie's vehemence. "What a pity anything should have come between you!" was all she could think of to break the silence, which she felt to be embarrassing.

Sissie shivered. "Let us walk, Lucy," she said, with sudden feverish restlessness; and the two girls passed out of the Monk's Own grounds, and on to the high road, before either of them thought where they were going. Sissie was first recalled to the consciousness of being in the public way by Walter Bligh suddenly appearing in front of them.

"Help me to be the same as usual," she whispered, grasping Lucy's hand with a convulsive pressure as she spoke.

"Whither away, young ladies?" asked

Walter. "Are you going to carry sticks to the bonfire?"

"What bonfire?" asked Sissie, with a sickly pretence of smiling interest.

"What bonfire! Why, our patriotic celebration of the fall of Sebastopol, of course."

"Sebastopol! has it fallen, then?" exclaimed Sissie, now actually feeling some slight interest in the news. "Has there been a great victory?"

"I believe so. We have only telegraphic news at present, as it only happened on the 8th; but there is a very general belief that the war is at an end. And you really know nothing about it?"

"Nothing. I have been shutting myself up lately, not feeling very well."

"And Lucy never told you?"

"We are sadly unpatriotic, are we not? Will this make any difference to Uncle Wilfred? Is he likely to come home when the war is over?"

"Not for good, I hope. He would never endure that. And I am afraid he will be hardly man enough to come home at all yet."

"On Sophie's account, do you mean, Uncle Walter," asked Lucy. "I think he must have got over that by this time. Sophie treated him so very badly." Lucy caught Sissie's eye as she spoke, and blushed crimson. "I must just run in and speak to old Nurse Watkins," she said, and disappeared into a cottage by the wayside.

"Did it ever strike you, Sissie, that Sophie Rice preferred my brother Wilfred to her other admirers?" asked Walter, as soon as he and Sissie were left alone.

"I used sometimes to think so," answered Sissie, "but it could not have been the case —she would never have behaved as she did to him."

"Cara thinks that she really cared for Wilfred, but that his prospects were not

brilliant enough to satisfy her ambition. Sophie is very ambitious—so different to Cara!"

"Does Mr. Warren satisfy her ambition?" asked Sissie.

"I am afraid not. That was a *pis-aller*, you know. Warren is not a bad fellow, but he keeps poor Sophie with a very tight hand. She is a good deal altered since her marriage. It would have been better for her to have taken old Wilfred, and now this war is likely to make a great man of him. I am very sorry for Sophie, though I know she has her faults. If she had never met with Arnold Preston, she might have gone on well enough."

"How could *he* have interfered with her?" inquired Sissie, faintly.

"She had been so used to the admiration of every man she met, that I believe his indifference to her made her give up everything for the chance of adding him to her

conquests—at least Cara says that it was so ; and that when once she had made the attempt to fascinate him, she would have sacrificed anything to avoid the disgrace of failure. If Mr. Rice had not insisted on the engagement coming to an end when old Preston lost his money, Sophie would have gone on with it—little as she ever liked the idea of being a poor man's wife."

Sissie was greatly relieved when Lucy rejoined them, as she had been listening to Walter in a kind of dream, and did not feel sure that, at any moment, she might not answer him in such a manner as to betray her own preoccupation. As soon as there was again a third to carry on the conversation, she found it impossible any longer to join in it ; and hastily saying "Good-bye" to her companions, she hurried home to her solitude, where, at any rate, she was spared the misery of having to force her over-taxed powers to act a part.

CHAPTER III.

SISSIE's solitude lasted three days, and then it was broken by the arrival of Sir Percy. Her first impulse, when she heard her father's voice in the hall, was to fly to the remotest corner of the house, that she might escape the sight of him. She had an undefined dread that, knowing what she now knew, she must see "murderer" written on the countenance which had once been her ideal of all that was good and noble. A moment's reflection was sufficient to arrest this impulse, and she remained motionless till Sir Percy entered the room. She dared not look at him, and the tender, melodious

voice made her shudder, as she sat with downcast head and studiously averted eyes.

"My darling, are you not well?" Sir Percy asked.

"Quite well, thank you, papa;" and then Sissie was forced to rise, and submit to her father's embrace, which she could not return.

"You are *not* well, Sissie," pursued Sir Percy, holding her from him, and looking into her face. "What is wrong, my child?"

It was impossible for Sissie to dissemble longer. "I have been at A——," she said, still averting her eyes.

"Where is that?" asked Sir Percy, in a tone of the most entire unconsciousness.

"Near Clifton," Sissie gasped out, faint with horror at this effrontery.

"And what did you see there, to scare all the colour from your cheeks?" asked Sir Percy.

Sissie raised her eyes at last, and looked fixedly into her father's face. She saw a

slight expression of embarrassment, but "Oh!" she thought, "what a hardened criminal he must be to look merely embarrassed, with murder, and such a murder, on his conscience!"

"You know what I saw," she answered, quickly dropping her eyes again.

"I know that there is a ridiculous bugbear which you children have set up only to frighten yourselves! I know that I have forbidden you to refer to this subject, and that I will be obeyed! Do you hear me, Sissie?"

"Yes," answered Sissie, who had now sunk back into her chair.

"I shall ask Boyd to come and see you," said Sir Percy, in an altered tone, after a few minutes' silence. "You have been knocking yourself up, flying about the country. You look more like a ghost than a living girl."

"I cannot see Mr. Boyd," returned Sissie,

coldly. " You know that I cannot tell him what is really the matter with me."

" If you go on in this way, Sissie, take care that I do not tell the whole world what is the matter with you and your brothers, and you will see then what is thought of children who plot against their father. This is a pleasant welcome home, I must say!"

Sir Percy left the room after this, and Sissie did not see him again till dinner-time. He had then quite recovered his composure, and treated her with the tender consideration due to an invalid. But he did not again speak of calling in Mr. Boyd, and by degrees Sissie got used to her father's presence so as to be able to talk with him on indifferent subjects without the shrinking horror with which the conviction of his guilt had first inspired her.

Sir Percy had been at Monk's Own nearly a month, when, one day at breakfast,

he handed a letter to Sissie, observing, "This is a bad business."

Sissie read :—

"Cover-heath, October 8th, 1855.

"DEAR SIR PERCY,

"I am afraid it will appear but an ungrateful return for all your kindness, when I tell you that I must give up the charge of Edmund. I do this with much regret, as I have found him a most agreeable companion, and my position here has been, in every respect, all that I could wish. But I am no longer able to do my duty in that position. I have had a blow which, I am ashamed to say, has so thoroughly unmanned me that—struggle as I may—I cannot rally my spirits, and I am, therefore, the very worst companion that Edmund could have. I have delayed this acknowledgment as long as possible, in the hope that time might give me the strength I want—but time appears to have the contrary

effect; and, in the meanwhile, Edmund is the sufferer. I have therefore resolved to leave him, and to try what entirely new scenes may do for me. I will remain here, of course, until you have made some other arrangement, but the sooner you can release me, the more grateful I shall feel. I cannot express half the gratitude I owe to you already—this one other favour will swell the sum yet higher.

"Yours very truly,

"ARNOLD PRESTON."

Sissie returned this letter to her father without a word.

As Sir Percy put it back into the envelope, he exclaimed, "I did not see what he has written here. I ought not to have shown his letter. He says, 'I know I may depend on you not to mention to any one my reasons for leaving.' It was stupid of me not to notice that," added Sir Percy

"But I don't think I have betrayed much. I suspect you know more about his reasons for leaving than I do, Sissie."

"Yes, *I* have driven him away," replied Sissie, in the tone of sad resignation which had now become almost habitual with her. "And I was driven to do so by—you know by what."

"By the phantom of your own creation, of which I heard once before, under similar circumstances, and of which I desire never to hear again. Then you are bent upon sacrificing, not only me and yourself, but this good, honest fellow, also, to this absurd chimera!"

Sissie did not answer—she knew it would be useless.

Sir Percy sent for Edmund to Monk's Own, and in a week the boy arrived, having travelled with Arnold, who went on to Dorlington.

"I shall go to say 'good-bye' to him

before he starts," said Edmund, as he finished his account of the journey.

"Where is he going?" asked Sir Percy.

"Where gold can be picked up by handfuls," returned Edmund. "I wish I was going with him! There is room to breathe in that country."

"You will miss him sadly, my poor boy," observed Sir Percy.

Edmund looked fixedly at his father.
"He is my sense," he said.

"He professes to have learnt a great deal from you."

"Not from me. I say what comes to me, but I do not understand it, it has nothing to do with me."

"That is genius, my boy."

"No. Genius means cleverness, does it not? I am not clever. Arnold says I am a poet. He writes down all that comes to me, and he says it is worth keeping. Now he is gone, nothing more will come."

"I will write it down, Edmund," said Sir Percy.

Edmund shook his head. "Only Arnold can make it come properly. It all gets into confusion without him. If I might go with him, I should be able to understand it all—and I could breathe where he is going."

"Then you would like to leave us all, Edmund," said Sir Percy.

"I am of no use here," returned Edmund, sadly. "Arnold says that a poet does more good than any one else in the world—but I shall never be a poet when I have lost him. Father, he is my voice, and I shall be dumb without him! Let me go! There is life where he is going!"

"How long will he be away?" asked Sir Percy, doubtfully,

"Always. He will never come back."

"And you would like to go away for ever, Edmund?"

"Yes," cried the boy, flinging out his arms, and throwing back his head, as if for air. "Everything is so narrow here. I have not room to grow. And I cannot be parted from Arnold."

"Are you sure that he would like you to go with him, Edmund? I believe that he wishes to go away quite alone."

Edmund hesitated. His countenance was sad and perplexed. "Yes," he said at last, "he does wish to go away alone." Then, with a strangely vacant look stealing over his face, and speaking in a low, dreamy voice, the boy continued: "He wishes to go away like a wounded lion, and to die in secret, forgotten by all the world. He thinks I do not know that he has been wounded to death, but I do. I have watched him grow paler and thinner every day; I have heard him groan, when he thought no ear was within reach. He thinks I do not know that he will never come back—he talks to

me of the wealth that he will bring with him—but I know that there is danger as well as gold in that country, and that he is not going to seek wealth, but a grave, where there may be rest for a wounded heart. I shall never see him again. He calls me a poet, but he has forgotten that a poet is also a seer, and cannot be deceived by flattering words of comfort, when there is no comfort.” Edmund’s low, murmuring tones ceased, and he stood for a few minutes perfectly motionless, the others remaining as still, in a sort of awe-struck silence. Gradually Edmund seemed to awaken, as if from a dream, shook himself, and, turning to his father, enquired in his usual voice, “What did you ask me, sir?”

“How did you leave all at Cover-heath?” said Sir Percy, thinking it best to change the subject.

The next day a note came from Arnold, telling Edmund that he was to sail from

Liverpool on the following Wednesday, and would be glad to see him at Dorlington before leaving. On the Monday, therefore, Sir Percy took the two boys to say 'good-bye' to their friend. When they returned in the evening, Edmund was calm, though very pale, but Clement's grief was quite uncontrollable, and Sir Percy said that, at the last, he had clung sobbing round Arnold's neck, until the scene was quite too much for them all, and poor Arnold himself had been completely overcome.

Sissie listened to all this with outward indifference, but with an ever-increasing longing to see Arnold once more before he went away. She knew that she could not go, as her brothers had gone, and openly take leave of him, but she resolved that she would see him—being herself unseen. Much as the natural independence of Sissie's character had been strengthened by the circumstances of her early life, and more

especially by the bold undertaking in which she had been engaged during the last two years, even she could not quite resolve on such a step as she had in contemplation without first consulting her father. When the boys had gone to bed, therefore, she drew nearer to Sir Percy, and in a low, trembling, but determined voice, said, "Papa, I *must* see Arnold once more."

Sir Percy looked greatly surprised, but merely said, "His ship is to sail at one o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. Shall I go over to Dorlington and beg him to come here to-morrow."

"He could not come," answered Sissie, mournfully. "He has said that he will never see me again."

"Then how can you see him?"

"I might see him without his seeing me. Oh, papa!" cried Sissie, her composure suddenly forsaking her at the thought, "If I cannot see him once more,—I—I—" she

could say no more, but completely broke down.

"My poor darling," said Sir Percy, tenderly drawing her towards him, "you love him then?"

"Yes," answered Sissie vehemently. "Papa! let me see him."

"I will do all I can. But what can be done? Have you thought of any plan?"

"I thought of going on board the ship, in disguise, before it sails," answered Sissie, timidly.

"I do not like disguises, Sissie," returned Sir Percy, "but I see no other way. I will go with you, of course."

"Thank you, papa," murmured Sissie, and as she said "good-night" to her father, she forgot everything but his present kindness, and kissed him with all the affection and confidence of the old happy days, before any doubts had come between them.

The next morning at breakfast, Sir Percy told Sissie that he wished her to go with him to stay for a few days at the house of an old friend of his at Manchester. Sissie of course agreed, and they started as soon as they could get ready. Sir Percy's friend was an old bachelor, much addicted to scientific pursuits. Sissie left everything to her father, feeling confident in his ability to carry out what he had undertaken. Before they separated for the night, Sir Percy told her that they were to start for Liverpool by the nine o'clock train the next morning, and that she would find a suitable disguise in Mr. Attrill's laboratory, which was a building separate from the house, into which the servants never entered.

In a second class carriage of the nine o'clock train there travelled to Liverpool a very old man and an elderly woman, in whom the most careful observer would never have discovered the slightest resemblance to Sir

Percy Monk and his daughter. Shortly after twelve they were on board the Golden Eagle, amongst a crowd of emigrants and their friends. Sissie could nowhere see Arnold. It only wanted ten minutes of the time when all who were not passengers would have to leave the vessel, when she heard Mr. Preston's voice, and turning in the direction from whence the sound came, saw him and Arnold standing near the ship's side in earnest talk. Confident in the perfection of her disguise, Sissie drew near to them. She heard Arnold say, "Tell my darling mother, that, as long as I live I will never fail to read in her little Testament every day, as she wishes. Poor dear mother! If I did not know that I leave her in far better hands than my own, I would give up going even now, though I feel that it is my only chance of ever being fit for anything again."

"I need not tell you that your mother will be well cared for, my dear boy,"

returned Mr. Preston. " You know how dearly I love her."

" I do," said Arnold, holding out his hand. " And now let me—you must let me this once—for the last time—say what I think of all your noble conduct to her, and to me —more especially to me."

" No, no, not that!" cried Mr. Preston. " My boy, I cannot bear it! God bless your heart! Ain't you for all the world like my own son; there's not a father in the kingdom loves his son better than I love you; don't talk of noble conduct, for heaven's sake, my boy. There's enough to break my heart without that."

" I will not," returned Arnold, with a faint smile. " But if I don't talk of it, I shall think all the more." There was silence for a few minutes, during which Mr. Preston was wiping his eyes, from which the tears were flowing fast. Then Arnold began again: " Don't let my mother set her heart

too much on my coming back. Try to make the hope of it gradually more and more vague. I have little hope myself that I ever shall come back ; nay, dear father, such things must be. I am determined to stay away till I can bear my trouble more like a man than I do now, and at present I do not feel as if that time would ever come. I feel utterly done for. And I have another reason for intending to remain abroad all the rest of my life. I cannot tell you that reason now, but I have left a sealed packet with Hadden and Fitch, to be opened after my death, which will tell you everything."

"Not me, please heaven," sobbed Mr. Preston.

"There is the bell!" exclaimed Arnold. "One thing more," he added, speaking very hurriedly. "When I last saw Miss Monk I used some harsh expressions towards her. Will you ask my mother to take an opportunity of telling her that I am very sorry I did

so. I once promised never to think badly of her under any circumstances. I am sorry that I have broken that promise ; and in future I will believe that she had good reasons for treating me as she did. She also will understand me better when the packet left with Hadden is opened. Tell her that till then I shall be faithful, tell her that I am going to Australia as Ritter Toggenburg went to Palestine, and with the same hope. Now, good-bye, God bless you, best, dearest of fathers!" As he spoke, Arnold threw his arms round the elder man's neck, and Mr. Preston, now sobbing without restraint, pressed him convulsively to his heart.

When Arnold released himself, and led his stepfather towards the stream of shore-bound visitors, Sissie followed closely, so closely as to be pressed against Arnold by the crowd, and to receive his courteous apology, as he drew aside to let the poor but respectable-looking old woman pass.



How she longed at that moment to discover herself to him, and get the tender look and word which she knew he could not then deny her. Another pressure from the crowd, however, separated her from him, and the opportunity was gone. Half-an-hour later she watched the ship steaming out of the docks, and felt, like poor Arnold, "utterly done for."

The next day, when Sissie reached home, she found there a note from Mrs. Preston, conveying Arnold's message. She had dreaded a visit, but when she received the letter, she felt almost disappointed at being thus deprived of the chance of seeing Arnold's mother. The letter was as follows:—

"3, Elm Grove, Dorlington.

"**MY DEAR MISS MONK,**

"Our dear son, who sailed for Australia yesterday morning, begged, as his last request, that I would send a message from him

to you. This was to ask your forgiveness for having broken his promise of never blaming you for any conduct towards him, and to assure you that, for the future, he will believe that you were in the right to behave to him as you did. He is sorry for having spoken harshly at your last meeting, and will be true to you until death. He compared himself to Ritter Toggenburg—of whom I conclude you have spoken together—and wished me to tell you that he goes to Australia with the same hope with which the Ritter went to Palestine. As he does not blame you, neither will I; but I cannot forbear saying, that if you could have consented to make my poor boy happy, I think you could not have been otherwise than happy yourself. Mr. Preston thinks the same, but these feelings are not to be controlled, and perhaps it would have been as impossible for you to love Arnold as it is for him to cease loving you. I am sure you will wish

him God-speed in the new country where he has, as he says, gone to seek forgetfulness.

"I remain, dear Miss Monk,

"Very sincerely yours,

"MARY PRESTON."

The last part of this letter painfully reminded Sissie of the discussion between Dr. Paterson and Arnold, when the former had maintained that Ritter Toggenburg sought for forgetfulness, and the latter that he sought for death. Mrs. Preston was evidently of Dr. Paterson's opinion, but that, Sissie knew, was not what Arnold's message meant.

CHAPTER IV.

THE state into which Edmund fell after Arnold's departure caused so much anxiety, that Sissie had little time to think of her own trouble. After taking leave of his friend, the boy had been quiet and silent, but soon he began to show feverish symptoms, and to be more wandering in his mind than he had ever been during the last year. Mr. Boyd could not understand what was wrong, but thought that the signs of illness would pass away as time should moderate the grief which had first produced them. Sympathy in their common sorrow now drew the brother and sister as close to each

other as they had been in their childish days, and they became inseparable companions. But still Sissie had no power to rouse or cheer Edmund, and he grew daily weaker and thinner, until Mr. Boyd began to hint at fears of decline.

One day that Edmund, being worse than usual, had remained in his room, Sissie was sitting in the drawing-room with her frequent visitor, Lucy, when Dr. Paterson was announced, and she had the pleasure of welcoming her Rhine friend.

"You see I have fulfilled my promise sooner than I expected," Dr. Paterson said, after shaking hands, and being introduced to Lucy. "I did not write to Preston, because I had to look after a practice at Scarborough, and I meant to give myself the pleasure of seeing you all when that was settled."

"And is it settled?" asked Sissie.

"No. Some delay has occurred, and I

thought I might as well come here in the meantime. Is there any chance of my seeing Preston?"

"He has gone to Australia," answered Sissie, as calmly as she could.

"To Australia! Why, he had no thought of that when I saw him."

"No. It was a very sudden resolve."

"Will he be away long?"

"I believe for some years," replied Lucy, seeing how pale Sissie had turned, and with what difficulty the words came from her trembling lips.

"I am very sorry," returned Dr. Paterson. "I never met with a man who so quickly won my esteem and liking. Such a man ought not to leave the country. We have plenty of scapegraces to spare for the colonies, but the mother country needs all her best men. What does he mean to do in Australia?" Dr. Paterson still addressed Sissie, but Lucy again answered

him. "He is going to the gold-diggings, I believe."

"Madness!" exclaimed the Doctor, unceremoniously. "What should a gentleman and a man of education do at the diggings? Turn into a navvy, and let his brains rust, whilst his muscles are over-developed. I would not have believed Preston could take up with such folly. I am more sorry than ever to hear this news." After a pause, he continued, "What of your little brother, Miss Monk?"

"He is quite strong again," answered Sissie; "much stronger than before his illness. I think you will see a great improvement in him."

"That is right. Some of those weakly constitutions are all the better for an actual illness—that is, if they can pull through it."

"We are very uneasy now about my eldest brother," Sissie was beginning, when Sir Percy entered the room, and the conver-

sation took a fresh turn. Before long, however, Dr. Paterson reverted to the subject of Edmund, and expressed a great interest in his case, of which he had heard something from Arnold. On seeing the invalid, he at once decided that he was now suffering from a slight attack of nervous fever. At the earnest request of Sir Percy, who considered that his son required more attention than Mr. Boyd's daily visit, Dr. Paterson agreed to remain at Monk's Own for the present; and his negotiations at Scarborough falling to the ground, he was able to devote himself to Edmund for as long as he might be required.

This unremitting attention from a man of real talent in his profession soon bore good fruit. The attack of fever was obstinate, though not severe, but when Edmund began to recover, his progress was rapid, and it was soon evident that his intellect was much clearer than it had been at

any time since his first seizure. When the boy had regained his usual health, Sir Percy made the proposal that Dr. Paterson should try the experiment whether the cure he had commenced might not be completed by taking his patient for a course of foreign travel. Dr. Paterson readily fell into the scheme, from which he anticipated the happiest results, and it was agreed that he and Edmund should start for the Continent immediately after Christmas, which was now approaching.

Grave as Dr. Paterson was, he entered with a good deal of quiet enjoyment into all the Christmas festivities of Monk's Own and the neighbourhood, and, in his fatherly manner, showed such a decided liking for Lucy whenever they were thrown together, that Sissie was not surprised when, two days before the travellers were to start, he began, in his calm, monotonous voice : " I wish, if you will allow me, Miss Monk, to ask your

advice in a matter of great importance to myself. I am not, as you **must** know, what is commonly called a 'ladies' man,' and, until lately, I have never felt more attracted towards one lady than towards another. But since I have been in this neighbourhood I have felt such an attraction. I think I need hardly tell you who the lady is."

"I believe I can guess that it is my cousin Lucy," Sissie replied, with a smile.

"You are right. Miss Lucy Monk appears to me quite the most charming girl that I have ever met with. It is not in my nature to '*fall in love*,' as the saying is. I must walk into love with my eyes open. I have had my eyes constantly open during the last two months, and I have not been able to detect in your cousin Lucy the slightest indication of any tendency that is otherwise than good and amiable. I do not deny that another power, stronger than reason, draws me towards her; but my

reason is a consenting party. And this, I feel, is as it should be. Of myself, therefore, I have no doubt; but I am very doubtful about your cousin. I know that I have none of those external advantages which are naturally pleasing to a young girl; and though Miss Lucy has always been very kind to me, I have plainly seen that she regards me much as she regards her uncle or her grandfather, without the filial affection which she entertains for them. I want your advice, therefore, as to whether it would be better for me to declare the state of my feelings before going away, or to wait until I have some further opportunity of attempting to gain your cousin's affections. I am so unused to questions of this nature, that I am quite at a loss as to which of the two would be the better course."

Like most silent people, when once they begin to talk, Dr. Paterson had gone on more in the style of an harangue than of a

dialogue, and until now Sissie had only had to listen in silence. By the time he stopped for an answer, she had, therefore, been able to make up her mind what that answer was to be, and at once replied : "I would advise you *not* to speak before going away ; but as, during the whole of your acquaintance, Lucy has never had an opportunity of missing you, to try the effect of absence, before you risk the loss of her present friendly feelings towards you by asking for anything more."

"I had no idea of *asking* for anything," replied Dr. Paterson. "I should only have made my own feelings clear to her. But I have no doubt you are right. You, of course, must understand your cousin's character much better than I can pretend to do, and if you think, as I do, that I have not yet succeeded in exciting anything warmer than friendly feelings, it would certainly be my best course to be silent for the present. I have often heard that, in

the case of an unattractive man, absence is often of more avail than presence."

So the matter rested, and Dr. Paterson took his departure, without making Lucy any clearer declaration than was afforded by a, for him, tender clasp of the hand at parting. Sissie felt convinced of the wisdom of her own advice, when she observed that Lucy, who had been in the constant habit of laughing at her grave admirer's little peculiarities, spoke of him much more respectfully as soon as he was gone, enquired frequently after the travellers, and read Dr. Paterson's very clever letters with the greatest interest.

It was now nearly two years since Herbert had disappeared. During all this time nothing had been heard of him, and Sir Percy, therefore, mourned for him as for one who was dead. Sissie, however, was not at all inclined to take so gloomy a view of the matter. She knew too much of

Herbert's resolute spirit to expect that he would soon send any news of himself to the home which he had left in such a manner as to have laid himself open to just blame. She therefore felt more pleasure than surprise when, one morning at breakfast, she opened a letter addressed to Edmund, and read as follows :—

“Buck's Hall. March 20th.

“DEAR MONK,

“I have just received the enclosed from your brother Herbert, with injunctions to forward it to your sister. Why he could not send it direct I cannot imagine !

“Yours truly,

“JAMES OTTERSHAW.”

This James Ottershaw was Edmund's only school friend, and had once or twice visited at Monk's Own during Edmund's short Eton course.

"News of Herbert, papa!" cried Sissie, joyfully, and she proceeded to open the letter directed to herself.

"DEAR SISSIE,

"I did not mean to write home at all till I come home a rich man, and that will be very soon now, for I have got amongst heaps of gold, and I have already made a better haul than fellows generally do in the time I have been here. I was at California first, but I didn't do much there. I wasn't strong or big enough then. What I write for now is about that young Preston that used to live at Kirklands. I've fallen in with him here, and I want you to tell his father and mother what has happened to him".

Sissie had read thus far aloud, but at this point her voice failed, and, growing every moment whiter and whiter, she read on in silence. When she had reached the end of

the letter, she remained perfectly motionless, and seemed hardly conscious when Sir Percy took the paper from her passive hand. He read from where Sissie left off.

"There is a man named Hughes here, who came to the diggings with Preston, and he is going to England at once, and will take this. I shall enclose it to Ottershaw, because I don't want Hughes to know who I am, and he used to have something to do with Monk's Kirk. He is the son of my father's lawyer, old Hughes. He says he will tell the Prestons about their son, but I thought, perhaps, I had better write to you first, for he is a rough sort of chap, and I used to like that little Mrs. Preston. I suppose she'll be awfully cut up about this. I will tell you how it happened, but Hughes will be able to tell you more, because he saw it, and I didn't, being fast asleep at the time. The worst of it is that it all happened on my account. There is a great brute of a

thieving scoundrel that has a spite against me, and, besides, he wanted to bag a potful of gold we'd got in our hut, and I was set to guard it. I had been fool enough to fall asleep, though I knew what this villain might be after, and there was no proper fastening to the door. Hughes and Preston were asleep too. The first I knew of anything being wrong was something heavy falling upon me, and toppling me over, and then I found I was lying on the ground, with some one else upon me, and blood all about. I knew one of us was badly hurt, but really at first I didn't know whether it was me or the other fellow. There was a great shouting, and a lot of men came and picked us up, and then I found that I hadn't a scratch or a bruise, but that Preston was killed—or as good as killed. It seems he must have seen the scoundrel's thundering great chopper coming down upon my head, and threw himself between just in time to

save me from having my brains dashed out. All the men here say he must have known it was certain death for one or other of us, and that his coming between was the pluckiest thing ever known. Our hut is crowded with diggers, who just come to have a look at him. They all say he can't live through the night, so you had better not give his father and mother any hope of him. There is a black fellow, that he has been kind to, who won't leave him, and is treating his wounds in some native fashion. A man who was a doctor in England tried to do something for him at first, but he said, as there wasn't a chance for him, black Joe might do his worst, for a man can die but once. Joe says he shan't die, but, of course, that is nothing but big words. These natives are horrid brags.

"If you know any girl that was poor Preston's sweetheart, or, perhaps, his mother may know her, I daresay she will like to

hear the only words he has said, or is likely to say. When we cut his shirt away, we found something hanging to a chain round his neck. We had to take it off for his wounds to be looked to, and so it was thrown on the floor with his other things. He was quite senseless at first, but about the middle of the day I found that he had got his eyes wide open, and was staring at me. Then I saw he was trying to say something, and at last I made out that it was 'where?' I thought he was wandering, and wanted to know where he was, but he shook his head, and tried to lift his hand to his neck. That showed me what he meant, and I picked up the chain, and gave it to him, and he actually smiled, quite pleased. After that he was quiet for a little while, and then he began to stare at me again, and to move his lips. This time I made out that he said 'bury;' so then I thought he was afraid, as so many of the diggers are, that no one

would take any trouble about him after he was dead, so I told him I would be sure to get him buried, and would have the burial service read over him, if I could find a parson, and if I couldn't, I'd read it myself. He listened very quietly, but when I had done, he shook his head again, and lifted his hand with the chain in it, and said, 'with me.' So then I told him I would take care the chain should be buried with him, and that made him smile again. The only thing he said besides was, 'Tell my mother,' and after that he began to toss about, and mutter, and now he is quite delirious. The black boy persists in sitting by him, and reading to him out of a little Bible Preston always kept in his pocket, but it is breath wasted, for he is quite past understanding anything. If he should speak again, I will write word what he says, but if he doesn't, and I don't write, his father and mother must understand that he is dead. Tell them that they may

depend on me to see him properly buried, and to do all that can be done for him. I ought to, for I should not have been alive to say so, if it had not been for him. Isn't it odd that I used to think him such a muff at home?

"Mind you don't let out anything about me to Hughes. I don't want to be known here. I think Preston knew me, he used to look so hard at me, and he said one or two things rather as if he was trying to draw me out. Hughes is going to start at day-break, and now it is past twelve. You had better tell the Prestons at once that their son is dead, it will be no good for them to be kept in suspense for two or three months, only to hear it after all. There isn't the shadow of a chance that he can live, all the men say so, except Joe, and he is a poor, ignorant, pig-headed fool."

"Give my love to old Ned."

"Your affectionate brother,

"HERBERT."

"P.S. The murderer made off as soon as Preston fell down, and Hughes rushed at him, shouting."

When Sir Percy had finished reading this, and looked at Sissie, she was sitting in exactly the same attitude, and with exactly the same expression, as when he took the letter from her. Her appearance alarmed him, and drawing close to her side, he put his arm round her waist, and made her lean her head upon his shoulder, saying, as he did so, "My poor darling."

Sissie made no resistance, but lay perfectly still, as her father had placed her, for nearly half-an-hour. Then she started up, and looking rather wildly about her, like a person awaking from a dream, said, "I must go."

"Where, darling?" asked Sir Percy.

"To him—to Arnold."

"Dearest—to Australia!"

"No, no," said Sissie, putting her hand to

her head: "Not to him, to them—to his mother."

"What for, my child?"

"To tell them."

"You had better wait till this Hughes comes; we shall know more then. Wait till then, darling."

"Wait," repeated Sissie, in a tone which wrung her father's heart. "Yes, I have a long time to wait. He has found what he wanted. Oh! when will my turn come? Yes, papa, you are right; it will be better not to tell them till Mr. Hughes comes."

CHAPTER V.

SISSIE had of late undergone so much suffering, that this last blow was more stunning than painful. She kept repeating to herself the words of Herbert's letter, but the sense never seemed really to reach her mind. There is a story told of a heavy sleeper, who, when aroused in the night by the news of his father's death, turned round on his pillow with the words, "How sorry I shall be when I awake!" It was just so with Sissie. She could not awake to the full consciousness of her misery, though she knew that, sooner or later, the bitter awakening must come, and that the longer it was de-

layed the more exquisite would be its bitterness. When, for three days, everything went on in its usual course, and not a word was said of Herbert's letter, the thought would again and again occur to her, "Then it is not true. He cannot be dead, and nothing else be different."

On the third day, as Sissie stood at the breakfast-room window, watching how the large park trees were swayed to and fro by the tempestuous March wind, she saw Wilfred Bligh coming up the avenue. A week ago this sight would have given her as much pleasure as she could have found in anything short of Arnold's return, or the discovery of her father's innocence. Now, however, her first thought was one of terror. "If he should have heard the news, and should speak of it, then it *must* be true." But Wilfred had heard nothing. He had much to tell, and was bright and cordial—glad to be at home again, and proud to

receive the congratulations of his friends on the advancement and honour he had gained —a very different man from the despairing lover who had gone away two years before. Sophie would not have felt flattered could she have heard the indifferent tone in which he spoke of Mrs. Warren. Two years of active service, following immediately upon the sudden discovery of Sophie's real character, had completely cured him, not only of his love, but of the pain of his disappointment. There was nothing assumed in the coolness with which he could now speak of the woman on whom he had once thought that his whole happiness depended. Sissie looked at him, and listened to him in astonishment. Were all men like this? she thought. She had treated Arnold as badly as Sophie had treated Wilfred: would Arnold overcome his love for her in less than two years? A thrill of delight at the remembrance of Herbert's story of the hair-

chain was followed by a pang of agony at the thought which that remembrance brought with it. All other men might forget their love as quickly as Wilfred had forgotten ; but Arnold would be—had been—faithful to the very last. No, no ! it could not be the last—he could not be dead ! She would not mind his ceasing to love her, if only he were still alive. As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, Sissie turned so pale that Wilfred exclaimed, in alarm, “ Are you not well ? Is the fire too hot for you ? ”

“ No,” returned Sissie, forcing a smile to her white lips. “ I will tell papa you are here ? ”

With her father Sissie found a stranger ; but until Sir Percy introduced “ Mr. Hughes,” it never struck her that this was *the* stranger whose arrival she had been dreading and yet eagerly expecting for the last three days. It seemed impossible that this fair, amiable-looking man, with his

affected drawl and insinuating smile, could be the "rough chap" Herbert mentioned.

"Is that one of the rector's sons?" asked Mr. Hughes, when Sissie told her father of Wilfred's return. "I remember two fine lads, who used to be a good deal about with us, when I was staying down here with Henry Monk. By-the-bye, Sir Percy, I have never heard what became of that poor fellow's wife and child. I believe that you and I were the only two who knew of their existence." Hughes spoke carelessly, but Sissie thought that the look he gave her father was anything but careless; it was a momentary glance of intense, eager suspicion—or, perhaps, her consciousness made her fancy more than she saw.

Sir Percy turned very red, but answered, without a moment's hesitation, "I certainly once had the impression that Henry was married, and had a child; but I found myself so entirely opposed to the general

opinion, that I gave up the notion. My children are very much inclined to get up some romance of the sort, but they cannot succeed in making much of it. Shall we go in and see Captain Bligh? He is our rector's eldest son—a very fine fellow, and he has lately won great honour by his gallant conduct in the Black Sea."

"I shall be very glad to make, or rather renew acquaintance with Captain Bligh," said Mr. Hughes, and the two men followed Sissie to the breakfast-room.

Even her first terrible discovery of her father's guilt had not given Sissie such a feeling of sickening horror as the off-hand manner in which he had met and parried what must have been such a home-thrust as the apparently careless question of Henry Monk's most intimate friend. For the moment this horror had superseded even the remembrance of Arnold, and it therefore caused her a shock of surprise when, after

the first greetings and some talk about Kirklands, where Wilfred Bligh and Mr. Hughes had last met, the latter said, "When we heard of your arrival, I was just telling Sir Percy of the sad fate which has befallen the son of the last possessor of Kirklands."

"What! Preston?" asked Wilfred. "Not Arnold Preston?"

"Yes, Arnold Preston. I made his acquaintance at the Australian gold-diggings."

"The gold-diggings! Ah, by-the-bye, old Preston was ruined, and I suppose the son had to seek his fortune as best he might. I am sorry for that, and still more sorry if any harm has come to him, as I think you said."

"It was a horrible business," continued Mr. Hughes. "As I was telling you"—turning to Sir Percy—"soon after we got there—we first met at Melbourne—Preston picked up a good-for-nothing little sailor lad, named Alexander Herbert—a runaway

middy, no doubt. It was a puzzle to me what he could see in the boy, who was a surly, conceited, selfish young rascal, though, for selfishness, all are selfish at the diggings —excepting, I must say for him, this unlucky Preston, who never seemed to care a bit what became of himself. He and I were nearly quarrelling, more than once, about Alexander Herbert. We had agreed to work together, and to share the spoil, and I had no fancy for letting this boy into our concern. At last the boy joined in with another party, the greatest rogues about, and we saw nothing of him for some time—at least, *I* saw nothing of him. I rather think Preston was always hunting him out, and trying to detach him from his associates. One day, when Preston and I were hard at work, with a better chance of success than we had had at all, young Herbert came to us with a pitiful story about his companions always robbing him of his share of what

they all found, and that now he had found by himself enough to set them all up, but he knew he should not get a single nugget if he did not keep his discovery to himself; and as he could not work it by himself, he begged Preston to come and help him. Would you believe it, in spite of all that I could say, Preston went off at once with him?—giving me the right to all that we had found, and not claiming a scrap of all that he helped the boy to work. It was a rich vein, and by night those two had got enough to make other men look enviously at them. Herbert did not go near his former mates, and Preston insisted on his sharing our hut. They worked together for three days, with most unusual success, and, at the same time, I was also very fortunate. We knew that we ran a good chance of being attacked by the boy's blackguard companions, and we had only taken up a temporary abode in a tumble-down old hut, so we agreed to watch

all night, turn and turn about. It was young Herbert's turn on the third night. The watcher had to pass the night sitting on the stump of a tree which was just in front of the crazy door. It was not easy to sleep in this position ; but it seems the boy did fall fast asleep. We others lay down in our shirts, on any odd bits of rag and matting we could get ; and we were both dead tired, and slept soundly. Suddenly I was awakened by a loud shout, and starting up, I saw by the moonlight, which was streaming in, that the door was open, and a huge man, whom I at once recognised as one of Herbert's old mates, was standing over the boy, with some shining weapon raised high above his head. At the same instant, Preston, whose shout had awakened me, sprang forward, and the next instant the uplifted weapon—which turned out to be an immense chopper—descended upon his outstretched arm, only just missing his

head, and he fell to the ground, on the top of the boy. The ruffian then made off as fast as he could."

"And was Preston much hurt?" asked Wilfred.

"He was killed. He was not dead when I came away the next morning, but there was no hope of his life, and before I sailed from Melbourne I heard of his death."

"Did the boy whose life he saved seem at all grateful?" asked Sir Percy, in a voice that trembled, in spite of his efforts to speak unconcernedly.

"Yes, he did, in a measure. But poor Preston's most devoted friend was a black fellow, to whom he had done some service. This man is sure to have taken every possible care of him. But there were many to look after him; his deliberate sacrifice of himself—for he must have seen that to attempt saving the boy, as he did, was certain

death—has produced quite an excitement amongst a lot of fellows who most of them seemed dead to everything but greed of gold."

"Do Mr. and Mrs. Preston know of this?" asked Captain Bligh.

"Not yet. I shall have the task of telling them."

"What a terrible affliction!" remarked Wilfred to Sir Percy. "They were both so devoted to that son."

"*I* was quite cut up about the poor lad," said Mr. Hughes. "There was something very much out of the common in him. I think I had better write to the father."

"I will undertake to tell them," said Sissie, abruptly, and Mr. Hughes poured out expressions of the most ardent gratitude for being relieved from his painful task. Sissie did not answer, but sat perfectly still, instinctively turning her pale face away from the light, that her own share in her

friends' grief might not be discovered to be deeper than sympathy.

That afternoon she started for Dorlington. There was nothing to be gained by longer delay, and Sissie had now a restless eagerness to realise her own misery, as she felt she only should realise it when she had seen the misery of Arnold's mother. Had she not been a fellow-sufferer, the task before her would have been much more painful. As it was, she knew that, heavy as was the blow she had to inflict, it had fallen, and would again fall, more heavily on herself. Under other circumstances, she would have spent the time occupied by the journey in revolving how best to break the sad news; now she could think of nothing but the moonlit scene that Hughes had described; it was all before her eyes as plainly as if she had seen it, or were actually still seeing it.

Perhaps, after all, no better way could have been chosen than that in which Sissie

told what she had to tell. Mr. and Mrs. Preston were together in their little drawing-room. They both rose in some confusion as she entered, for they had not seen her since Arnold left, and, strive as they might to be just and charitable, it was impossible for them not to feel some slight resentment against her who was the cause of his leaving. Sissie understood this in an instant. When they had sat down again, after the rather stiff greetings, she placed herself, as she had once before placed herself, on a low seat beside Mrs. Preston, and hiding her face as much as possible, that her news might not be betrayed before the time, she began, "I have something to tell you. I know that you must dislike to see me—for I sent him away from you"—she could not say "Arnold." "I want to tell you now, that, though I sent him away, I loved him quite as much as he loved me."

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Preston.

"When first he asked me to marry him I did not love him, and I told him so. But afterwards I learned to love him as I knew that he ought to be loved." Sissie had spoken so far in a dull, mechanical way, as though repeating a lesson. Suddenly she caught sight of Arnold's portrait hanging against the wall. The forced composure forsook her at once. The belief in his death came home to her at last, and throwing herself on her knees, she buried her face in Mrs. Preston's lap, and exclaimed, "Oh! forgive me—be kind to me, for his sake!"

"For your own sake, my dear child," returned Mrs. Preston, bending down, and kissing Sissie's head, from which the hat had fallen back.

"You don't know all yet," continued Sissie. "I cannot tell you, till you believe that I love him." She raised her head as she spoke, and Mrs. Preston, seeing her face for the first time, exclaimed, "My poor

child! take comfort. He will come back to us. You must not make yourself ill with grieving for him."

"I *cannot* be ill," said Sissie, bitterly. "But—but, oh! dearest Mrs. Preston, *he* is ill!"

"Ill! How do you know?" cried Mr. Preston, springing forward, whilst the mother said nothing, only turned very pale.

"My brother is with him—in Australia." *With him*, she had said, and then the question occurred to her—where was *he*?—Perhaps as much here as in Australia, and at the thought, she began to tremble so violently that she could say no more. There was a short silence.

"Did your brother write?" asked Mr. Preston, at last, very gently, but in a hoarse, choking voice.

"Yes."

"Have you got the letter?"

"Yes—but——"

"I wish to see it, if you please."

Sissie knew by his tone that he suspected the truth. She could not resist the authority with which he spoke, and she took the letter from her pocket, and handed it to him, without a word. Mrs. Preston watched her husband's face as he read, but said nothing. Every word of Herbert's letter was impressed on Sissie's memory, and following line by line, she knew that Mr. Preston had reached the part where the certainty of Arnold's immediate death was first announced, when, with a gasping cry, he fell to the ground.

Mrs. Preston rose at once, and went to her husband. He had fainted. Sissie fetched water, and, before very long, he revived.

"We have each other still, dear John," were his wife's first words, as he opened his eyes, and looked wonderingly at her.

Sissie saw that her work was done, almost without any necessity for telling the later news, but she forced herself to add, "Mr.

Hughes has come, and he says that it is all over," and then, leaving the two together, she went into the dining-room, a dingy, comfortless *parlour*, with shabby chairs placed against the walls, and a canary singing shrilly before the window. Here Sissie seated herself. It had all come to her now. She had heard his mother speak of his death as a fact. She could no longer refuse to believe it. In the touching language of the patriarch Jacob, *he was not*. Not!—gone!—passed away!—a memory only! The musical voice silent!—the earnest eyes closed!—the strong manly form immovable in the grave—for ever! For ever? Should she never again hear the music of that voice?—never again see the light in those eyes?—never again feel the clasp of that strong, tender hand?—Never again! An awful, crushing despair came upon Sissie. She did not know how long she sat in this parlour, but she never afterwards entered a

similar room, or heard the shrill song of a canary, without the remembrance of such suffering as few women could endure and live.

"My poor dear child, forgive me for having forgotten you," said a broken, but very kindly voice, and Sissie learnt that it was possible even for a mother to lay aside her own grief for her only child, in order to give comfort to another.

"Oh, do not think of me," answered Sissie.

"Not think of you! You must be my own daughter now. We must love each other for his sake. He loved you best of all the world, and you tell me not to think of you!"

Sissie could not speak. She tried to stand up, but the room seemed to whirl round with her, and she was obliged to sit down again.

"Your hands are like ice, poor child!" continued Mrs. Preston. "Have you eaten anything to-day?"

Sissie could not say she had, she had only taken a little tea at breakfast. As she did not answer, Mrs. Preston fetched some wine, and gently forced her to swallow a few drops.

“How can you be so good?” asked Sissie, when she was sufficiently revived to speak again.

“My poor dear! Ah, this has been too much for you! It was too hard that *you* should have to bring the news to us.”

“I—I hardly understood it till now,” said Sissie, shivering, as she again rose from her chair, and looked round the room in which she had suffered so much.

“Ah, I know that so well!” exclaimed Mrs. Preston. “It is not at first that we feel our grief. God is very merciful. He prepares us by degrees for what would kill us if we realized it all at once. Now come with me, dear child. We must try and comfort poor Mr. Preston. They loved each other dearly.” The mother’s tears began to

flow as she spoke, but she wiped them hastily away.

"Oh, do not," cried Sissie. "Let me see you cry. You are thinking of every one but yourself."

"I cannot afford to think of myself yet," answered Mrs. Preston, smiling through her tears. "But you need not fear for me. Mr. Preston and I have been crying together whilst you, poor child, were sitting alone, and not shedding a tear, I am afraid."

In the drawing-room Mr. Preston was sitting, with his head bowed low, and the tears raining down his cheeks. His wife went gently up and kissed him, and then left the room, saying that she would have a bed made ready for Sissie. Mr. Preston held out his hand without speaking, and Sissie pressed his fingers to her lips, remembering that it was this great rough hand which had been the last to grasp Arnold's hand before he went away.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Sissie was told that a room was ready for her, she felt that it would be better for her host and hostess, as well as for herself, that she should at once withdraw to it, although she dreaded solitude, as likely to bring with it a recurrence of that awful despair which had overwhelmed her when alone in the little parlour. She felt ashamed of being the object of all the tender care which Mrs. Preston bestowed upon her, and she therefore hurried into bed as quickly as possible, and expressed a desire to go to sleep. She did not believe it possible that sleep would come, but it did, and she forgot everything

for a few hours, until she was awakened by voices in the adjoining room, which was separated from her room by a very slight partition only.

"What a selfish brute I must be," Mr. Preston was saying, "that you should be comforting me, instead of me comforting you, as I ought, by rights."

"It was not selfishness that made you love my boy, dear John," Mrs. Preston answered gently.

There was a sound of sobbing, and then Mr. Preston said in a broken voice, "Who could help loving him? What a noble, manly heart he had! Even now it makes me feel glad, somehow, to think that Miss Monk didn't really make light of having won such a heart!"

"Poor girl! It would have been better for her if she had cared for him as little as he thought she cared," answered Mrs. Preston. "I am very sorry for her."

" You think more of her than yourself, Mary."

" I am afraid it is with her as it was with me when I lost our boy's father. It was all darkness then to me, and I fear it is all darkness now to her. She cannot say, ' Thy will be done.' Thank God, dear John, we have learned to say that. Without that, what would our grief be now?"

" Mary, when you are so like an angel, I tremble to think that you will leave me too!" said Mr. Preston.

Sissie heard no more words, only a confused sound of sobs, and gentle, soothing murmurs, and then all was silent. For the rest of the night she lay awake, pondering on what she had heard. This, then, was the secret of Mrs. Preston's unselfish calmness. It was not indifference, it was not mere self-command; it was Christian faith and submission. Sissie had, hitherto, thought very little on religious subjects. Hers was not a

speculative mind, and she had never felt the need of any strength above her own, excepting on one occasion, when she had found what she needed in Arnold's straightforward counsel. Her own religion had consisted in a scrupulous observance of the few simple rules which her grandfather had instilled into her childish mind. To say her prayers and to read her Bible night and morning, to go to church every Sunday, to tell the truth, to command her temper, and to give up to others, these were the laws by which her life had been ruled, and by obedience to which her conscience had been satisfied. When her conscience grew perplexed about her father, she had, in a manner, transferred it to Arnold's keeping, making his views of right and wrong the guide of her conduct. When trouble came she looked to the same source for comfort, drawing from Arnold's love, and Arnold's worthiness, consolation for the grief caused by her father's unworthiness.

Even the estrangement from Arnold, and his absence, did not cut off from her this source of comfort. Absent and estranged, he was still the same to her; she could still rejoice in the thought of his goodness and his love. But her comfort could not reach beyond this world. Now that he was dead, his goodness and his love could only add to her grief, for she had not the faith necessary to pierce through the grave, to the world where goodness and love shall be perfected. She had never till now conceived of such a faith. Her ideal of the Christian character was quite satisfied by the Rector and his son Walter, and they were in fact thoroughly good men, moral, upright, and benevolent, sound theologians, and zealous parish priests. But their faith was more of the head than of the heart, a faith which in times of prosperity and strength might be all sufficient, but which in times of trouble and temptation would often grievously fail. Sissie perceived

that Mrs. Preston's faith was not of this kind. Her logical mind at once recognised *that* as the true faith in Him who invited to Himself all who labour and are heavy laden, and she felt that for one as heavy laden as herself, it was the only hope of rest.

Sissie left Dorlington the next afternoon much happier than when she had come there —in spite of having there first realized her sorrow. That morning she had sat for hours with her eyes fixed on Mrs. Preston's sweet, placid face, drinking in from her lips the hope which could make a mother feel that all was well, even when her only child had been violently cut off in the full vigour of his early manhood.

At Monk's Own Sissie found Miss Colquhoun, who had arrived at the Rectory the day before, and was waiting now to see Sir Percy, who was up at Kirklands with Mr. Hughes.

"This is very sad news about Arnold

Preston," Miss Colquhoun said, as soon as she had accounted for her unexpected appearance in the neighbourhood. "But I don't think his father and mother need despair. I am inclined to put great confidence in black Joe's treatment."

This was the first word of hope that Sissie had heard, and she was half disposed to resent the suggestion, now that she had at last become almost resigned to the worst. It was terrible to look forward to months of suspense—to be followed, perhaps, by a fresh blow, the bitterness of which would prove that hope had mingled with the suspense.

"But Mr. Hughes said positively that he—that it was all over," Sissie faltered out.

"I never believe what Alfred Hughes says," returned Miss Colquhoun. "And his only authority was the report of some men who had seen Herbert and some others digging a grave. I have not seen Her-

bret's letter, however," she added, reading, without much trouble, something of what was passing through Sissie's mind. "Perhaps it is best to believe the worst, and thus avoid all danger of disappointment. What news of Edmund, Sissie?"

As Sissie told all there was to tell about the travellers, Miss Colquhoun observed her attentively, and soon gathered certain confirmation of the suspicion she had long entertained as to the girl's real feeling for Arnold. Hard as Harriet Colquhoun appeared in many things, no one could be more tender to any real feeling, and she was most anxious now to give Sissie all the relief possible—rightly judging that the most effectual external relief must come from anything which could divert her mind to another subject. At the first opportunity, she therefore began: "My real reason for making this raid upon the Rectory, was a little anxiety about your father. I hardly

know what I fear—but I will tell you why I fancy that we have all cause to fear something. You saw my delightful brother-in-law yesterday?"

"Yes. He brought Herbert's letter to England, as you know. And you understand, Aunt Harriet, that Herbert does not want Mr. Hughes to know who he is?"

"I quite understand any one not wanting Alfred Hughes to know anything they could prevent his knowing. *I* would not trust him with a thought of mine—much less a secret."

"What makes you think so badly of him?" asked Sissie, who had been rather favourably impressed by Hughes's expressions of liking for Arnold.

"I told you of his conduct to my sister. But it is not that only. The first time I saw the man I experienced that instinctive recoil that we feel at the sight of a venomous reptile. My instincts never deceive me.

When I reason about people I am often wrong, but when I trust entirely to instinct, I am always right. This man does not give at all a satisfactory account of poor Julia—indeed, I believe that he has not seen her for more than a year. I always knew that, as his wife, she must be a miserable woman."

"Where is your sister, Aunt Harriet?" asked Sissie.

"In New York, he says. They have one girl, a great invalid, and Julia never leaves her. He went to California when gold was first discovered there, and when it was discovered in Australia, he went there also. He evidently thinks nothing of leaving his wife and child."

"Was it anything that Mr. Hughes said which made you uneasy about papa, Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes. You know that he and your father were rivals for the favour of your poor mother. I did not know that till lately. I

remember, not long before Julia went away with him, I was several times puzzled by the vindictive manner in which Hughes spoke of your father. Percy Monk was such an universal favourite, that for him to have an enemy was a thing to remember. Alfred Hughes has not forgotten his enmity any more than I have forgotten its existence."

"He seemed very friendly with papa yesterday," remarked Sissie.

"He is a consummate actor," rejoined Miss Colquhoun. "No one can be more frank and cordial when it suits his purpose. Did you hear him mention Henry Monk at all?"

"Yes," faltered Sissie, now for the first time remembering Mr. Hughes's allusion to Henry Monk's wife and child.

"What did he say?"

"He asked papa if he knew what had become of his wife and child."

"Did he put the question in an indifferent

manner, as if it were merely a passing thought?"

"Yes. But I thought he was trying to appear more indifferent than he really was."

"I believe he has some scheme in his head with reference to this supposed wife and child of Henry Monk. He came to me as soon as he arrived in London, but I did not give him credit for being prompted to do so by mere brotherly affection. I was certain that he wanted something, and when I found that it was not money, I knew that I was supposed to have some knowledge which might be of use to him. As soon as he began to question me, with over-acted carelessness of tone, as to the relations which had subsisted between your father and his cousins, I saw his scheme, whatever it might be, in some way involved his former rival. You will think me very double-faced, Sissie; but I must confess that, as soon as I suspected this, I did all I could to throw him

off his guard, and to induce him to take me into his confidence. I even spoke disparagingly of your father, and my manœuvre was so far successful, that Hughes no longer attempted to disguise his enmity, but told me plainly that he hoped to have the means of doing Sir Percy a serious injury. What that injury was to be I could not discover. He is too wary to be unreservedly open. I could only make out, and that not with certainty, that he thinks he has it in his power to accuse your father of having purposely concealed some confidence which Henry Monk reposed in him as to a secret marriage and the birth of a child. Whether he intends to make use of this accusation as a means of wreaking his revenge, or as a means of extorting money, I could not induce him to say. The accusation itself is, of course, too contemptible to be worth a thought, but in the hands of a very clever, and most unscrupulous man, it may be made

the cause of much annoyance to Sir Percy ; and, as forewarned is forearmed, I made up my mind to come here at once, and give the warning, which I hope may prove as good as a weapon."

"How kind of you, Aunt Harriet," said Sissie, not knowing what else to say. It seemed like ingratitude for the deep interest Miss Colquhoun took in her father not more fully to confide in her, and yet Sissie could not betray how much the truth exceeded Hughes's suspicions. She was much relieved, therefore, when Lucy's entrance put an end, for the present, to any talk on this subject. Lucy had come by appointment, to walk back to the Rectory with Miss Colquhoun, but she had evidently, also, something important to say to Sissie.

"Have you told her, Aunt Harriet," she began, as soon as she was seated.

"No Lucy. I beg your pardon, but we have been talking of other things,"

" Will you tell me what you think of this, Sissie," Lucy continued, with a blush, as she gave Sissie a letter. Sissie was not surprised to see from whom the letter came, and the style was most characteristic. Dr. Paterson wrote :—

" Genoa, March 30th, 1856.

" **MY DEAR MISS MONK,**

" By the advice of your Cousin Sissie, I forbore, whilst I was in daily intercourse with you, making known to you the great regard and affection which I have entertained towards you ever since I first made your acquaintance. Your cousin agreed with me that it was unlikely you could in any degree return my feelings of warm interest, and that I should have more prospect of a favourable hearing if I allowed some time to elapse after my departure, before telling you that the greatest happiness you could confer upon me would be to grant

me the hope of one day calling you my wife.

"I do not now press for any answer. I do not even ask for any hope, at present. I only wish you to know that, whatever answer you may at any time give me—however little hope I may attain—you will always possess the entire love of yours, ever faithfully,

"ROBERT PATERSON."

"I suppose I *must* give some answer," observed Lucy. "What can I say, Sissie."

"What do you feel?" replied Sissie. "Do you like Dr. Paterson?"

"Yes,—very much—but——"

"Not enough to be his wife?"

"Not so much as I once fancied I could like some one else," replied Lucy, blushing deeply.

"Take my advice, Lucy," exclaimed Miss Colquhoun. "Don't, for a mere fancy,

give up a woman's only hope in this life!"

Lucy sat silent with astonishment at the unwonted excitement of the usually imperturbable "Aunt Harriet."

"I do not for one moment counsel you to marry without love," continued Miss Colquhoun, "but I do most earnestly counsel you not lightly to bring upon yourself the desolate hopelessness of a single life."

"Then do you think all old maids must be miserable, Aunt Harriet?" asked Lucy, timidly.

"Not all, Lucy. Some are too stupid, and some are too hard, and some, a happy few, are too religious."

"Would you have every woman marry?" asked Sissie, looking up with her sad, heavy eyes.

"Not every woman, Sissie," returned Miss Colquhoun, very gently. "A memory fills the hearts of some. And I am not speaking

of those poor girls whose imagination has been suffered to run riot for want of healthful occupation, and who, therefore, take some foolish youth of their acquaintance, and set him up as an idol, to whom they sacrifice their lives. In a short time the idol topples over, and they are crushed beneath its ruins. There is no possibility of marriage for such as these, unless all delicacy of feeling has been lost in the ruin of their hopes. But there is another class, much more numerous, who would like to have an idol, but are not quite sure which of their acquaintance is worthy of the throne; and when a husband offers himself, will have nothing to say to him, because he has not all the attributes of their fancy picture."

Lucy looked rather conscious. Miss Colquhoun continued: "They repent too late when they see their bright youth melting away into colourless old-maidenhood, and feel all their high hopes and noble aspira-

tions, not only decaying, but turning into bitterness."

"But, Aunt Harriet," said Sissie, "all old maids are not bitter."

"Some have sufficient force of character to resist the fatal tyranny of custom and social duties. But through their constant struggle to assert their own rights—rights of conscience as well as position—they become so hardened, that when all family ties relax, they are no longer women, but a bad imitation of men. Others yield up with their rights their spirits and their intellects, and when they are left alone in the world they are utterly helpless, and are only fit to be despised dependants in some relation's house, and to fritter away their silly lives in vanity and gossip. Women of these two classes are not unhappy; but she who suffers is the woman who has it in her to make a good wife and mother—the capability of passionate love, and of unbounded devo-

tion—and who has the hourly torture of seeing these capabilities give place to selfish apathy and mean-souled care for trifles. Some such women are happy enough to find a legitimate object for their pent-up instincts in caring for the orphan children of a sister or a friend. Others, in their desperation, seize upon duties which are not their own. But by far the greater number go on in the daily routine of their lives, shackled at every step by tyrannous exactions and petty jealousies, stifling their consciences, checking their energies, and, above all, smothering deep down in their hearts the agonised cry of sensibilities that have no outlet, powers that have no exercise, and yearnings that have no relief.”

“But, Aunt Harriet, *you* are neither masculine nor frivolous, and yet you are not unhappy,” said Sissie.

“I have been singularly fortunate. Being left independent whilst still young, I was

able to form for myself a position, which is what no woman, after forty or fifty, can do. There is plenty of pity expended on *young* orphans ; but no one regards the utter desolation of a middle-aged single woman when she is left alone in the world, after a life of childish dependence which has utterly unfitted her to be left alone. And this is almost the worst of it : these tragedies—tragedies of wasted lives—are going on around us every day, and the world laughs at them as farces ; the old maid being fair game for punsters and essayists, for school-girls and hobbbledehoys. ‘Only an old maid ! Hit her again—she ain’t got no friends !’ No, Lucy, forget your fancy. Be grateful for the sincere love of a good man, and escape the fate of which it is beyond your imagination to appreciate the misery.”

Miss Colquhoun’s unwonted earnestness had attained two desirable objects. Lucy had been made ashamed of a fancy which

had never had any real depth, and Sissie's sympathy had been aroused for sufferings of which she had never before suspected the existence. Amongst the various classes of unmarried women, those appeared the least pitiable of whom Miss Colquhoun had said that a memory filled their hearts.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS COLQUHOUN was very unwilling to return to the Rectory without having seen Sir Percy ; so, when it began to grow dark, Clement was sent home with Lucy, and Harriet resolved to pass the night at Monk's Own. Sir Percy did not come in till quite late. He looked anxious and harassed, but his elastic spirits immediately revived at the sight of his old friend.

" It was only this morning that I was wishing for the wise woman of Mount Street," he said.

" I believe all the wisdom we can muster between us all will be needed," replied Miss Colquhoun.

Sir Percy looked surprised. "Have you heard anything of the matter I wanted to consult you about?" he asked.

"Yes; he spoke about it to me when he was in London."

"Mr. Hadden spoke to you?"

"Mr. Hadden! No; I know no Mr. Hadden. I was speaking of Alfred Hughes."

Sir Percy started. "Oh, *he* spoke to you, did he? That was not the subject on which I wished to consult you. It was about a letter I had this morning." Sir Percy glanced anxiously at Sissie.

"If the letter is about Arnold Preston, papa, I would rather hear all there is to hear," said Sissie, firmly. She remembered that Arnold had mentioned the name of Hadden and Fitch as that of the legal firm with whom he had deposited some papers, to be opened in the case of his death.

"There is nothing to hear, darling," re-

plied Sir Percy; "only something to answer. Hadden writes: 'A report has reached me of the death, in Australia, of my client, Mr. Arnold Preston. As he left some papers in my custody, with injunctions to open them in case of his death, but on no account to open them unless the fact of his death were thoroughly well authenticated, I am anxious to obtain more reliable testimony to the fact than that which has reached me. Knowing that Mr. Preston was on intimate terms with your family, I conclude that you are likely to be well informed on this subject, and I therefore take the liberty of applying to you. Yours, &c.' That is all," continued Sir Percy. "I suppose I must tell him that I believe the report to be quite true."

"No," returned Miss Colquhoun; "no report which has been conveyed by Alfred Hughes can be relied on as 'quite true.' If I were you, I would tell Mr. Hadden

what Herbert says, and advise him to wait till Herbert writes again, as he must before long. There can be no harm done by waiting; but much harm can be done by acting on any assertion made by my dear brother-in-law."

"But, Aunt Harriet," Sissie obliged herself to say, "Herbert says that he shall not write again unless—unless Arnold is better."

"Some further news is sure to come, and I would recommend that all should be left uncertain till then," persisted Miss Colquhoun.

"Very well," said Sir Percy. "Then I will write to Hadden that one who is never wrong advises him to wait."

"And now for *my* business," said Miss Colquhoun, after a long silence. "Did Alfred Hughes bring a most preposterous accusation against you?"

Sissie plainly saw her father wince at this question. He answered slowly, "Yes."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him I would wring his neck if he mentioned it again to me."

Miss Colquhoun looked alarmed. "That was hardly prudent," she observed.

"I should not have been so violent," returned Sir Percy, "but the scoundrel had the impertinence to propose that I should bribe him to silence. As if I should descend to put myself in the power of a low gambling adventurer!"

"Has he the means of annoying you in any way, Percy?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"Yes," returned Sir Percy, gloomily.

"And have not you the means of clearing yourself?"

"No," said Sir Percy, in the same tone.

"When he told me of the absurd charge he proposed to make against you, I was doubtful whether his object was revenge or pecuniary profit. It seems that it was the latter."

"It will be revenge now that the other has failed, and that I have insulted him," returned Sir Percy without raising his head, which had been bent down through the whole conversation on this topic.

"At any rate he will disguise his true object. If he intends to pursue his revenge on you, his first step will be some advance towards a reconciliation—that is, if, as I suppose, you parted in anger."

"Certainly we parted in anger," rejoined Sir Percy, in a tone which showed an evident desire to drop the subject.

The next morning the two ladies were sitting with Sir Percy in the study, when Clement came in, saying, "Papa, Mr. Hughes is waiting outside to know if he may come in and see you. I met him on the way from Monk's Kirk."

"Tell him he may come in," returned Sir Percy, sternly. "Don't go," he added, as Miss Colquhoun and Sissie were preparing

to pass into the library. "I am less likely to forget myself if you are present. Otherwise, I might be tempted to throw him out of the window."

Hughes entered the room with a conciliatory smile, from which Miss Colquhoun augured the most malicious intentions. He looked a little startled at the sight of his sister-in-law, but proceeded at once to make his excuses to Sir Percy.

"I have asked to see you this morning, Sir Percy," he said, "in order to make an apology for the words at which you so justly took offence yesterday. I think I have been hardly myself since I have been in this neighbourhood. Everything reminds me so forcibly of that poor fellow, and I can hardly bear to think that he and all his should have passed away and been forgotten. You remember what warm friends Henry Monk and myself were, Harriet?" he added, with a decidedly feeble attempt at brotherly ease.

The expression of Miss Colquhoun's face was not encouraging, as she answered, dryly, "I remember that there seemed a particularly good understanding between you."

"Just so; nothing could be more entire than our confidence in each other. I was present at his marriage, and am naturally, therefore, extremely anxious to find out what has become of his wife."

"And you were present, also, when, *after his marriage*, he made love to my poor sister," remarked Miss Colquhoun, in a tone of undisguised contempt.

Mr. Hughes laughed uneasily. "You must overlook that indiscretion. Sir John would never have forgiven Harry if he had refused to carry out his matrimonial views for him. And there was no danger of Julia's peace of mind suffering through our little farce."

"Your little farce was certainly very cleverly played," returned Miss Colquhoun.

"But I much doubt whether consideration for poor Julia's peace of mind formed any part of the original plot."

Hughes laughed again. "All is fair in love and war," he said. "I must confess that the plot was mine. Harry had considerable scruples about it. But what was the poor fellow to do. He stood in the utmost dread of his father, upon whom he was entirely dependent, and he knew perfectly well that if he were to tell Sir John that he could not marry the wife chosen for him, because he was already married to a foreigner, he should never see another penny of the very liberal allowance his father made him. And there were reasons at that time which made it particularly undesirable that his wife's little property should be their only means of supporting a family."

"And to these considerations Julia was to be sacrificed," remarked Miss Colquhoun,

who was anxious to keep Hughes's attention to this view of the case.

"When Henry Monk heard of the birth of his son," pursued Hughes, "he insisted on bringing the farce, as you term it, to an abrupt conclusion—too abrupt, I thought; for Julia was so difficult to read, that we could never feel quite sure that our plan was succeeding. If it had failed, however, Harry was determined to throw himself on her mercy, and tell her the whole truth. This hazardous step was uncalled for, as you know. Julia at once rejoiced his heart by a most decided refusal, and an hour afterwards he was on his way to his wife and child."

"You left at the same time," said Harriet, sternly, as she fixed her eyes on her brother-in-law.

Hughes shrank a little under that steady gaze.

"And you had then no intention of returning," Miss Colquhoun continued.

The whole expression of the man's countenance changed. He had been looking carelessly triumphant in the cleverness of his own plot, but, at the same time, craftily observant of his auditors. Now, for the first time, a dark flush of something like shame crossed his face. But the anger, which is the usual accompaniment of shame, was directed, not against her who had evoked the shame, but against Sir Percy, at whom he darted a momentary glance of bitter hatred, as he answered, "My work was finished, as far as my friend was concerned, and I confess that I did not then think of reaping any personal benefit from what I had done in his interest only. After circumstances, however, made it my own interest to follow up the advantage I had gained." Another malignant glance at Sir Percy gave point to the mention of these "after circumstances." Without a moment's pause, Hughes continued, in a

quiet, confidential tone, addressing himself to Miss Colquhoun, "Having had no communication with any one in England for many years, I was unaware, until I made acquaintance with that unfortunate lad Preston, that both Sir John and his eldest son were dead. I was naturally surprised to hear that the Captain Monk whom I had known as a distant cousin of the family, was in possession of the estates, and my first anxiety was to discover whether the claims of my poor friend's child, or children, had been duly recognised. I travelled to England with this object in view, and came at once to Monk's Own, having an impression —conveyed to me by Henry Monk himself —that Sir Percy was aware of his cousin's secret marriage, and of the birth of his eldest child. Sir Percy assures me that such is not the case, and my next step must be to employ the proper agents to search into the matter."

"Surely there will be no difficulty in discovering whether or not Henry Monk left a child," remarked Miss Colquhoun, carelessly.
"Monk is not a common name."

"Monk is not the name I should inquire for. Henry Monk had a fancy for assuming as a surname his second Christian name of 'Maurice.'"

Sissie observed her father start at these words, and she observed also, that Alfred Hughes saw the start. He continued, "The best thing I have to guide me in the search is the knowledge that Harry Monk and his wife lived at Clifton for some years."

"Harry Morris didn't live at Clifton," said Clement, whom no one had hitherto noticed, but who had been listening intently to all that was said. "He lived at A——"

The little boy's remark had somewhat the effect which might have been produced by an earthquake on the rest of the party in the study. Sissie felt at once that she

ought to have foreseen this danger, and she felt at the same time that, through her neglect and her brother's forwardness, their father was lost. Sir Percy's face showed that something of the same nature was passing through his mind. Miss Colquhoun evinced unbounded astonishment, and Mr. Hughes showed some surprise and much eagerness for what was to follow. "Who is Harry Morris?" he inquired of Clement.

"The boy that was drowned," Clement answered. "Sissie and I were a long time trying to find him, and when we did find him, he was dead."

"Who was this boy, Miss Monk?" Hughes asked.

Sissie had had time to prepare herself for some such question. She knew that nothing could now avert the inevitable result of Clement's disclosure, but she was resolved that no word of hers should hasten that result. Her face grew a shade paler, if that

were possible, than it had been before, and into her eyes there came the look of some hunted animal at bay, as she replied forcibly and distinctly, "I decline to answer any questions on that subject, Mr. Hughes."

Miss Colquhoun's glance of startled dismay was hard to bear, but harder still was the look of tender compassion which her father gave Sissie, as he said to Hughes, "The search Clement has mentioned was undertaken with my knowledge, and my consent; but I was not aware of the result of that search. I cannot press my daughter to answer any questions which are disagreeable to her, but you are at liberty to ask Clement whatever you please." Sir Percy rose with quiet dignity as he spoke, and moving to Sissie's side, laid his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Where did you go to look for this boy, Clement?" asked Hughes, immediately

availing himself of the permission given to him.

"To A—," Clement replied, "a little village near Clifton. At least, that's where we saw his grave. We went to a great many places first to try and find him."

"What places?"

"We went to Scotland once, and stayed with such a nice lady and her son; and we went to Germany, and what was the other place, Sissie, where the canals were, that made me ill?"

"Holland," suggested Hughes, as Sissie did not answer.

"Yes, Holland. Such a funny country, and the people talked so queerly! But we had such a nice man to go about with us."

"Did you hear anything about Harry Morris in Holland?" asked Hughes.

"Yes, Sissie said she had found out what she wanted, but I did not know then that she wanted to find him."

"When did you know that?"

"When we went to the place where his papa died."

"What place was that?"

"A place near the sea—what was it, Sissie? Oh, I know, Yarmouth, where the bloaters come from that Phœbe has for supper."

Hughes could evidently hardly restrain his excitement. The others listened with various emotions of surprise or terror.

"And Harry Morris's papa died at Yarmouth?" continued Hughes.

"Yes. He died when he was bathing, but he was not drowned."

"How do you know he died at Yarmouth?"

"Because I saw his tombstone there."

"What was the name on the tombstone?"

"The same name as ours. The boy's name was Morris, but his papa's name wasn't that; it was Henry Maurice Monk."

"Then how do you know he was the boy's papa?"

"Because the lady said so, at the place where I was ill, where the big tun is."

"Heidelberg?"

"Yes."

"What was the lady's name?"

"Pepper, or something like that, wasn't it, Sissie?"

"And you saw the boy's grave, as well as his father's?"

"Yes, I saw it first. Sissie didn't go there to look for it. She didn't know he was dead till I showed her the tombstone."

"What was on the tombstone?"

"First there was about his mamma, and then about him, and it said he was found drowned in the river, and he was seventeen years old."

Sissie felt a closer pressure from the hand which rested on her shoulder.

"Did you find out anything more about him?" was the next question.

"Yes. A woman told us he didn't fall into the river, but he was pushed in by a gentleman that took him for a walk. And when he didn't come back, but was found dead, his mamma died too, and they were buried together. The gentleman never came back either."

"Did the woman say anything more about the gentleman?"

"She said he had brown eyes, like mine. And she said the boy was like me, too."

Sissie was trembling so much now, that she could hardly sit upright, but to her surprise, she felt that her father's hand was perfectly steady, and looking in his face, she saw that he was apparently unmoved by any deeper feeling than that of surprise and interest.

"I don't think I need trouble you any more now," said Mr. Hughes, with un-

disguised satisfaction. "You are a capital witness, my little friend. A—— I think you said was the name of the place where Harry Morris was buried? This is very important evidence," he continued, turning gravely to Sir Percy. "I shall go at once to A——. My impression was that Harry's eldest child was not named after him, but after his wife's father—some German name, such as Albert or Ernest."

"His name was Harry Ernest," put in Clement. "The tombstone said so."

"Ah, that would be it," cried Hughes. "I believe I need not intrude any longer now. I am much obliged for the great assistance you have allowed your little son to give me. You will not to-day refuse to shake hands, as you did yesterday? No, that is right. You and I have known each too long to quarrel for a trifle. Good-bye, Harriet, I shall see you again before I go back to Julia. By-the-by, did I tell you that our

poor child is named Harriet, after you ?
Good-morning, Miss Monk."

" You see I was right, Sissie, when I assured you that there was no nearer heir than myself in existence," said Sir Percy.
" I am very sorry you should have had all this worry, my poor child," he added, as he tenderly kissed Sissie's forehead, and then left the room.

" What *does* all this mean, Sissie ?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

" Oh, Aunt Harriet, don't ask !" answered Sissie, " you will know quite soon enough."

CHAPTER VIII.

SISSIE's hourly fear now was that her father should be missing, as she felt that this would be tantamount to a confession of guilt, and yet, as the days passed on, and Sir Percy went about his usual occupations as calmly as ever, she began almost to deplore the rashness of his conduct in not escaping from the result of the investigation, which could hardly end otherwise than in his being arrested as a murderer. For a month nothing was heard of Alfred Hughes, and Sissie was sometimes inclined to think she had dreamed the extraordinary scene before his departure. Miss Colquhoun remained at the Rectory, and came very frequently to the

Tower. Sissie observed that her manner was more serious and anxious than usual, but she never again alluded to her brother-in-law and his accusation. Nor was the subject ever mentioned between Sissie and her father. Sissie, however, was so persuaded that Alfred Hughes was all this time busily occupied in collecting the evidence which was to crush Sir Percy, that she could not for a moment forget the impending catastrophe. She was, therefore, unwilling to leave home for a single hour, much as she would have liked to pay another visit to Dorlington. Mr. Preston was dangerously ill with bilious fever, and his wife was entirely engrossed in nursing him. Nothing more had been heard from Herbert, and even Miss Colquhoun was forced to acknowledge that the faint hope she had entertained of Arnold's being still alive, must now be given up. Had there been the slightest flaw in Sissie's constitution, her health must have

failed under this accumulated load of sorrow and anxiety. But, as she had said to Mr. Preston, she *could* not be ill. Physical pain would not come to her, to intensify or to alleviate her mental sufferings.

Sissie had got into the habit of always hurrying to the study the first thing on her return from the short walks with Clement, which were the only occasions on which she ever now allowed herself to be absent from home. One evening, towards the latter end of May, she and her brother had been for a longer stroll than usual, and, on stopping at the study door, she was startled to hear strange voices within the room. Entering, she found two men, not gentlemen, with her father. The one was taking papers from the private drawers, the other was seated close to Sir Percy, who looked stern, but quite composed. Sissie understood it all, before her father said, "Don't be frightened, dear, I am a prisoner, but it will not be for

long. The accusation against me is one which, I am happy to say, no one who knows me will, for a single instant, credit, and no real evidence can be brought to prove it."

"I am ready now," said the man who had been busy with the papers. "We had better go at once. We have barely time."

Sir Percy rose immediately. "I am ready, also," he said. "The sooner this matter is properly investigated, the better for me. Courage, my child," he added, cheerfully, to Sissie, who had sunk into a chair, "there is nothing to fear in this. The charge is too preposterous to be entertained for a moment by any unprejudiced person."

Sissie remained silent and motionless. If she had spoken, she could only have said aloud the words which she kept inwardly repeating to herself: "then it has come at last." She saw one of the men take her father's arm, and lead him towards the door,

the other following close. Looking earnestly at her as he was about to leave the room, Sir Percy seemed to be struck with a sudden idea. He turned round so abruptly that his custodian could not resist the movement, and stopped before his daughter.

“It was not *this* you thought of me, Sissie?” he asked in a high, sharp voice.

Sissie could not answer. She looked in her father’s face with an expression of mute agony.

“You believed me to be a murderer?” continued Sir Percy, in the same tone.

“Oh, papa! What could I think?” Sissie managed to gasp out, as the policemen became impatient, and again drew their charge towards the door.

“You may do your worst with me now!” muttered Sir Percy bitterly. “My own child has condemned me! The sooner I am hanged the better.”

Poor Sissie was left to the remembrance

of these words, and the bitter glance of reproachful pain which was the last expression she had seen on her father's face. He was gone, and she had not the least idea where.

Feeling that to do nothing was not to be borne, Sissie was on her way to Monk's Kirk, when she met Miss Colquhoun and Wilfred Bligh coming to the Tower.

"Where is your father?" asked Wilfred, as they drew near.

"Gone," answered Sissie, seeing from his face that he knew what had happened. "He has been arrested. Where will they take him, Uncle Wilfred?"

"To Gloucester, I believe. There is time to catch the train"—taking out his watch. "I will go too, Sissie, and learn more about this. Good-bye. It will be all right, never fear."

When he was gone, Sissie turned to Miss Colquhoun. "Aunt Harriet, do you believe it?" she asked, wistfully, for her father's

parting look had somehow shaken her own doubts of him.

"Believe it, Sissie! Believe that Percy Monk is a murderer!" and Miss Colquhoun laughed, in scorn.

"You don't believe it, then?"

"My dear child! Do you?"

"Yes—no. Oh, Aunt Harriet! I have believed it ever since last August—but now—I don't know what to think. Aunt Harriet, it is all my fault! It is I who have betrayed him!"

"Betrayed, child! You cannot betray a lie. To call Percy Monk a murderer is the basest lie that ever was invented."

"How did you know about it?" asked Sissie, more calmly, having caught some portion of her companion's assurance.

"William Warren came to the Rectory, in great distress. He had been applied to, as a magistrate, to sign the warrant for your father's apprehension. He could not refuse

to sign, as the case was made out on apparently conclusive evidence; but he is most anxious that you should all understand with what reluctance he was dragged into the business."

"I quite understand that," returned Sissie. "Did he tell you what the charge really is, Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes, as far as he understood it himself. But he says he was so surprised and shocked that he had no very clear idea of anything. He only knew that a boy called Harry Morris was murdered at Bristol nearly six years ago,—that this Harry Morris can be proved to have been the son of Henry Monk, and that it is pretended that your father is the only person who could have had any interest in his death."

"Is that sufficient evidence to prove papa the—to have—" Sissie could not finish the sentence, but Miss Colquhoun knew what she wished to say.

"I don't know. I suppose only a lawyer could tell us that. Wilfred will learn all he can on the spot, and then, if your father consents, he will put the case into the hands of some lawyer,—not old Hughes, for the son might manage to tamper with it,—though he and his father are not on good terms. At any rate, Sissie, the truth *must* prevail in the end, and all your father's friends know that this preposterous charge is not the truth."

"How good you are, Aunt Harriet!" cried Sissie.

"Good!" exclaimed Miss Colquhoun, with a strange kind of laugh, and to her surprise Sissie saw that her friend's eyes had filled with tears. She inwardly vowed that she would never again agree in the general opinion that Harriet Colquhoun was a worldly-minded woman.

In four days Captain Bligh returned. Sissie saw with alarm that he could not

meet her eye, and that he was unwilling to answer the questions she put to him. Seeing this, it followed naturally with Sissie that she should be at once determined to know the worst, and she begged Wilfred to tell her all there was to tell. Wilfred looked helplessly at Miss Colquhoun.

"You need not fear to speak openly," was Harriet's reply to the look. "We are all confident that, however strong the evidence may appear, it must fail when it comes to be really sifted."

Wilfred did not look at all as if he shared this confidence, and Sissie, compassionating his embarrassment, said: "I will go in, Uncle Wilfred, and then you will be able to speak openly to Aunt Harriet, and she will tell me afterwards all I ought to know."

The three had met in the park. Now Sissie left the others, and went into the house. In half an hour Miss Colquhoun

joined her—looking more vexed and excited than Sissie had ever seen her look.

“Uncle Wilfred does not think as you do, Aunt Harriet, does he?” asked Sissie sadly.

“I never suspected that Wilfred Bligh was so wanting in common sense,” was Miss Colquhoun’s answer.

“What did Uncle Wilfred hear?” asked Sissie.

“He was present at the examination before a magistrate. The strongest evidence against him—against Percy—was, that just a week after Sir John Monk’s death, when only this boy—Harry Morris, as he was called—stood between your father and Monk’s Own, the boy was taken out walking by a man, to whose identity with Sir Percy two witnesses are ready to swear. Neither the man nor the boy were seen again in A——, but the boy’s body was found in the river two days after, and there is a witness to swear to having seen a scuffle

between a man and a boy on the bank of the Avon, which ended in the boy being thrown into the water. This witness also declares that your father was the man—though, having been at a great distance, he will not undertake to swear to the identity. One piece of evidence, which is terribly against us, is that amongst your father's private papers there has been found a letter from Henry Monk, which, though part of it has been torn away, proves that Sir Percy must have known for many years of the existence of this boy, who, after Rupert and his sons, was the real heir to Monk's Own. His concealment of this knowledge will be, of course, the great point against him."

"It was that which first made me suspect him," said Sissie, in a low voice.

"I have asked you nothing about your suspicion, Sissie, because I saw that all questions were painful to you. But now, I think, we shall be better able to see our way

clearly, if you tell me all you know, or have thought, on the subject."

"Yes, Aunt Harriet," returned Sissie, meekly; and she proceeded to relate, from the very beginning, the growth of her suspicions against her father.

Miss Colquhoun listened attentively. When all was told, she said: "First, Sissie, you must clearly understand that I do not believe for one moment that there is any real ground for the graver suspicion. I must believe—and I suppose every one must believe—that your father did conceal his knowledge that Henry Monk had left a son. But I have no doubt there may be some explanation of this, which may palliate the bare fact. Now, we have to consider what can be done to refute the circumstantial evidence which has been so skilfully collected."

"Is any lawyer to be employed, Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes. Wilfred has put the matter into the hands of a firm recommended by Hadden and Fitch—you remember about them?"

"Yes."

"The lawyers they recommend are Fitch and Stevens—Mr. Fitch is a brother of Mr. Hadden's partner. They have a first-rate reputation. Your father at first refused to have any legal advice; or, indeed, to make any defence at all. Wilfred was obliged to impress upon him that it would be unfair to his children not to use every means to clear himself."

"But Uncle Wilfred does not believe that he can be cleared."

"Wilfred was so shocked at his appearance, and his mode of expressing himself—he said that no positive confession of guilt could have told more against him than his looks and words did."

"Is there anything I can do, Aunt Harriet?" asked Sissie.

“Yes. Mr. Fitch says their course must be to prove an *alibi*—that is, you know, that the accused was elsewhere at the time the deed was committed of which he is accused. Now, for that purpose, old letters will be invaluable. Do you think you have any letters from your father written at that time?”

“I have all his letters to mamma. They have never been touched since her death, and she left them arranged in the most perfect order. She never destroyed one. He wrote to her nearly every day when he was anywhere in England. I will look at once.”

As Sissie had said, the letters were arranged in the most perfect order. She had not the least difficulty in finding the packet labelled—“Letters from Percy, during his visit to Monk's Own. July 5th to August 2nd, 1850.” Sissie ran back to Miss Colquhoun, exclaiming: “See, Aunt Harriet!

These letters are all from Monk's Own, and they are from July 5th to August 2nd, 1850—that proves that papa could not have been in Gloucestershire on August 1st."

Miss Colquhoun took the packet in her hand. There were twenty-five letters—all arranged according to their dates. She opened the last in order, and after a startled glance at Sissie, turned rapidly to the preceding one.

"I still do not believe that he is guilty, Sissie, but this is terrible," Harriet said, looking at Sissie with a very pale face. Sissie bent over Miss Colquhoun, and read the note she held in her hand.

"Bristol, July 31st.

"I am on my way home at last, darling, and hope to be with you in two days at farthest. Having business here, I thought it better to make a slight détour on my homeward journey, than to start off

again after reaching home. I shall have much to tell you when we meet, but now will say no more than that I am your ever loving husband,

“PERCY MONK.”

Miss Colquhoun turned, in silence, to the next note—the last in the packet, and Sissie read:—

“Clifton, August 2nd.

“DEAREST NELL,

“You may expect me to-morrow evening. My business is finished, and I have nothing more to do but to get home to my darlings as fast as possible.

“Ever your own

“PERCY.”

Sissie and her friend looked at each other in silent dismay for a few minutes. At last Miss Colquhoun said, in a hoarse voice:

"These will be of use in fixing your father's whereabouts at that time. But it is the most unfortunate coincidence that he should have been at Clifton."

"But you don't believe he is guilty, Aunt Harriet?" asked Sissie, imploringly. "You said you did not."

"No, Sissie, I do not. I should hardly believe it if he told me so himself."

"Aunt Harriet, may not I go to him?"

"Yes. We will both go to Gloucester, and Wilfred shall go with us. You know, Sissie, that you may have to give evidence?"

"I thought of that. Aunt Harriet, I cannot think there is any hope!" cried Sissie, with a sudden burst of despair, as she remembered how her evidence must tell against her father.

"His not having forbidden your search will be very much in his favour, as well as his not having destroyed Henry Monk's letter."

"Had I better destroy the scrap I have?" asked Sissie.

"No. Send that to Mr. Fitch with the letters. No concealment can do any good now. Our only hope lies in getting at the whole truth."

"Have you any idea what the truth can possibly be, Aunt Harriet?"

"My only idea is that, as we know nothing of the mother's life subsequent to her husband's death, and very little before that, there may have been others, besides Sir Percy, who had an interest in getting rid of the boy. Or the murder may have originated in some sudden quarrel. Or the boy may have fallen into the river accidentally, and the stranger have been afraid to go back with the news."

"Then you don't think the stranger was papa."

"Most certainly I do not."

CHAPTER IX.

IT was agreed that Captain Bligh should escort Miss Colquhoun and Sissie to Gloucester, and should then go on to London to confer with the lawyers. Clement was left at Monk's Own for the present, although there was every likelihood that his evidence would be called for at the trial. When Wilfred had seen the ladies established in a comfortable lodging, as near as possible to the gaol, he prepared to leave them. First, however, taking the opportunity of Miss Colquhoun being out of the room, he surprised Sissie by drawing near to her, with an air of great embarrassment, and in a constrained tone, beginning: "I am afraid you will

think what I am going to say exceedingly ill-timed, Sissie. But will you give me the right to do all I can for you in this matter?"

"The right, Uncle Wilfred?" Sissie repeated, looking at him in astonishment. "You are very kind to take so much trouble for us, but surely you have the right."

"No, I have not, Sissie—not in the eyes of the world. I must not stay with you now."

"Why not?" asked Sissie, innocently.

"Because you are neither my sister nor my wife."

"Oh, Uncle Wilfred! When we are such old friends!" cried Sissie, blushing, but without the least embarrassment.

"Will you marry me?" demanded Wilfred, abruptly.

"Uncle—Wilfred!" exclaimed Sissie, slowly, in a tone of unbounded astonishment.

"I know I am a grim old fellow, Sissie,

but I would do my very utmost to make you a good husband, and—and——”

“And you think that I shall need a husband in all the trouble that is to come,” added Sissie, looking earnestly into Wilfred’s face. After the first minute of intense surprise, she understood what this offer of marriage meant. Wilfred had no hope of her father being cleared, and in his compassion for the sad and desolate condition which he knew to be in store for her, he was anxious to afford her and her helpless brothers the protection they would so much need.

“I know what you mean, Uncle Wilfred,” she continued, sadly, “You are very good and generous. I know you would make a good husband.”

“Then let me be your husband, Sissie,” put in Wilfred, as she paused.

“No, Uncle Wilfred, that cannot be. Some one whom I loved asked me to be his

wife, and I would not, because of this. He is dead. I can never be any other man's wife."

There was something in the calm despair of Sissie's tone which deeply moved Captain Bligh. "Forgive me," he said. "What I asked must have seemed like an insult to you. I never suspected the double sorrow you have to bear. Forgive me if these ill-judged words of mine have added to it."

"No," returned Sissie, with a smile. "Nothing makes any difference. If I could feel either pain or pleasure, I should be pleased to think what a kind friend you are to us all."

But when Captain Bligh was gone, Sissie was obliged to own to herself that he *had* added some pain to the heavy load she had to bear. The fresh grief of her father's danger had, for the time, driven away every other thought, and had changed her mourning for Arnold from a sharp suffering into

a dull aching sense of some irreparable loss. Now the sharp suffering had been reawakened by the thought of how readily she could have accepted from Arnold the sacrifice which Wilfred had desired to make for her. To Arnold she knew that it would have been no sacrifice, but a great joy; and had she not driven him away to die in a foreign country, she might now have granted to him this joy of sharing her load of anxiety and disgrace, and to herself the relief of having it shared by him.

The old grief, however, could not long stand in competition with the pressing claims of the new one. The next morning she was admitted to an interview with her father, and when she saw him a prisoner, so altered by one week of suffering that he seemed to have aged twenty years, she forgot everything but his trouble and danger, and threw herself, sobbing, into his arms.

“And you believe that I am a murderer,

Sissie," said Sir Percy, in a tone of reproachful tenderness, as he held her from him, and looked earnestly into her face, after having kissed her again and again.

"No, papa, not now. Not since that morning in the study at home."

"But you did believe it, Sissie."

"How could I help it, papa? You—you—" Sissie hesitated, not liking now to reproach her father with the fault which there could be no doubt that he had committed.

"I was guilty of one crime, and I might, therefore, be guilty of another—that is what you would say, Sissie, is it not?" asked Sir Percy, gently.

Sissie rested her head against her father's shoulder, but did not answer.

"I know that is what must be thought by every one, and that is what will hang me. Nay, darling"—as Sissie caught hold of his arm in terror—"we must face the

worst. I have had plenty of time to think it all over, and I cannot see any hope of escape. Fitch even could not say that there was any hope. The evidence against me is overpowering, and we have very little to bring against it. My own conduct alone would be sufficient to convict me."

Sir Percy was silent for some time. Sissie could only cling to him and tremble. "The worst," which she had vaguely dreaded, had never before been put into such awful words. She could not face it now.

"If my children and my friends do not believe me guilty, I can bear it. Indeed, I think, if I could be sure of that, I should be happier now than I have been for many years. I did a great wrong, Sissie, and I suffered for it, but I had not the courage to repair it. Now that my punishment has come, my conscience is more at rest than it has been for the last six years ; and, if I am to die, I can die in peace. But I should

like to be certain that my children will not think of me as a murderer."

"Never, papa, never!" muttered Sissie,
"never again——"

"But, darling, it will all be proved against me."

"I will not believe anything against you now."

"Did Harriet come with you?" asked Sir Percy, after a short silence.

"Yes; she would not come in." Sir Percy went to the door, and requested that Miss Colquhoun might be admitted. "She has never doubted you," added Sissie, in a remorseful tone, as her father returned to her.

"She is a good friend," returned Sir Percy. "But many of my best friends will be forced to doubt me. Wilfred Bligh has given me up."

Sissie could not contradict this. "He asked me to marry him, papa?" was all she said.

"He is a generous fellow. And you, Sissie?"

"I told him I could never marry."

"My darling, I wish you could. If I could know that you had a good husband to take care of you, I ——"

The end of this sentence, which Sissie dreaded to hear, was happily cut short by the entrance of Miss Colquhoun.

"I have sent for you, Harriet," said Sir Percy, after warmly shaking hands with her, "because I want you and Sissie both to hear my confession. But first let me thank you, my best friend, for your faith in me. It is not a mistaken faith, so far. I am not a murderer. I am going to tell you what I am."

There was a long silence, and then Sir Percy began, in a tone as if he had been long considering what he had to say. He had, in fact, made the confession before, to his lawyer. "In the spring of 1837 I

received a letter from Henry Monk, in which he told me that he was secretly married, and had a son—then nearly four years of age.. He requested me on no account to mention this to any one until after his father's death, as, his wife being a foreigner, he was convinced that Sir John would disinherit him, were he to know of his marriage. He said that he confided his secret to me, in order that, in the case of his dying before his father, I might see that his son's rights were not overlooked in the distribution of the property. He expressed his confidence in Rupert's justice and liberality, but said that he had applied to me, instead of to his brother, because he and Rupert had not been on friendly terms for the last few years. He told me also, that his wife knew nothing of his being likely ever to have more than the allowance which he then received from his father, and which she believed to be the fruit of his own talents and industry. She

was not aware that he had any relations. I remember that the letter finished with a bitter reflection on his father's hardness towards him, and a comparison between his wife's fond affection and the coldness of his own family. There was a little sketch at the top of this letter," continued Sir Percy, with a glance at Sissie, "and my poor little Nellie begged to have it for her scrap-book. I remember well that my little daughters were sitting on my knees when I received and read the letter. I did not think the matter of much consequence—as Henry's life seemed as good as my own—so I tore off the drawing, and gave it to my pets. That was a fatal gift to you, my poor darling"—to Sissie. "I thought no more about the matter till I heard that Henry Monk was dead. I was at Gibraltar then, and I did not come home till the following year. Then I went to Yarmouth, saw his grave, and made various inquiries there and

at Clifton. All in vain, however. I could learn nothing about his wife and child. As I was forbidden to mention what I knew till after Sir John's death, and Sir John was then as vigorous as ever, I let the matter rest, and, in fact, almost forgot it, till I heard from Harriet Colquhoun that Rupert's boys were all dead. Immediately after that I was summoned to Monk's Own. Rupert himself was then dead, and his father died three weeks after. Every one acknowledged me as the heir. Every one to whom I hinted the least suspicion of Henry having married scouted the idea. I must tell you,—to Harriet, then to Sissie—“you, my poor child, knew it only too well—that our circumstances were greatly embarrassed at that time. My dear Nellie was worried almost to death by clamorous tradesmen, whose bills could not be settled. The temptation was very strong. I determined, however, to make another effort to find the boy who

stood between me and prosperity. I went to Clifton again, and for two days searched everywhere. I was convinced that no person of the name of Monk was living there at the time Henry wrote to me. I came to the conclusion—I confess, not unwillingly—that Henry had never been legally married, and that his confidence to me was a mere imposition. You know, Harriet, that he was not incapable of such an imposition. You both of you know the rest. I took possession of Monk's Own, and never knew another happy moment. My wife doubted me, and, I believe, died of the doubt. My boys doubted me till Edmund's mind became affected, and Herbert ran away from his home. My daughter suspected me—first of knavery, and then of murder—and now all who ever hear my name will shudder as at the name of a murderer, and I shall have to suffer the penalty of a crime which, I do believe, bad as I have been,

it would have been impossible for me to commit."

"I believe that entirely, Percy," said Miss Colquhoun, who had listened in deep emotion to the disclosure of weakness which now seemed likely to incur the heaviest punishment which can be inflicted upon crime. "Can you bring forward witnesses to prove how you spent those two days at Clifton?" she asked, after a pause.

"I don't think it will be possible to account for all the time," replied Sir Percy. "And that is what Fitch considers the most hopeless feature of the case. I have at last managed to recall to my own memory all the particulars of that visit. But as I did not know a creature at Bristol or Clifton, and, in fact, was anxious to be unknown myself—not being prepared to proclaim the business which took me there—it would be impossible to find witnesses to swear how I passed my time during the whole of the

two days. I remember that I got to Bristol late in the evening of July 31st, having travelled from Monk's Own that day. I was tired, and went to bed at once, after writing a few lines to my wife. The next morning I went to Clifton, and paid visits to two clergymen, and two or three doctors—I am not sure how many—nor am I certain as to the time of each visit. I know that in the evening I took a stroll along the river—probably just at the time this murder was committed, if murder it were. That night I slept at Clifton, but not having succeeded at all in my search there, I went back the next day to Bristol, and made a good many inquiries in that town also, equally without any satisfactory result. You understand that it was for the name of Monk, not of Morris, that I was searching. I had no idea that Henry had borne an assumed name at any time."

"I cannot see that there is any positive

proof of this Harry Morris being Henry Monk's son," said Miss Colquhoun. "To find another father for him would be the best defence we could set up."

"Undoubtedly," returned Sir Percy. "But see how Sissie's search for Henry's son led her to this boy's grave."

Sissie could not suppress a shudder at the recollection.

"On what does Mr. Fitch propose to rest his defence?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"He did not tell me. But I don't think the idea of producing another boy in the place of the one supposed to be murdered ever occurred to him. It was left to the wise woman of Mount Street to suggest that."

"To suggest the idea is easy," said Harriet, "but carrying out the suggestion is another matter. Sissie's search for the name of Morris in Clifton was quite fruitless, and, you know, it was only by chance that

she lighted upon the tombstone in A—— churchyard. If it were possible to trace back the history of this Harry Morris and his mother, something might be made of that. If the poor boy were really Henry Monk's son, he may have been in the way of others besides yourself. I suppose one ought to have implicit confidence that the lawyers will do all that can be done, but I confess I am conceited enough to have more faith in my own penetration."

"Every one knows that you have penetration enough to beat all the lawyers in England, Harriet," said Sir Percy; "but I suspect in these matters there is less need of penetration than of a sort of technical knowledge of the points most likely to tell in the defence. Our time is up now. One word, Sissie, about Edmund. You had better not let him know anything of all this. Bligh tells me that Dr. Paterson is going to marry little Lucy; but they can't be married

yet, and Paterson has undertaken to travel with Edmund for a year. Unless Fitch thinks it possible to gain anything by more time, it must be all over one way or the other in less than a month. If it goes well with me, my poor boy need never learn how ill it might have gone. If it goes ill, you will have plenty of time to break it gently to him, and he will be saved all anxiety and suspense. I wish you could have been saved that too, my darling. I do not like to see you so pale and thin. This hand is getting quite transparent. You must try to bear up, Sissie, for Clement's sake and Edmund's."

Sissie could not make any answer, but she clung to her father's neck, and felt that, even in the undoubting confidence and love of the Cover-heath days, he had never been so dear to her as he was now.

CHAPTER X.

MISS COLQUHOUN was determined to try whether her penetration would not avail to find out much which might escape the penetration of the lawyers. She therefore went to Clifton, having first summoned Mrs Rupert Monk to take her place with Sissie. Mrs. Rupert was as firmly convinced as Miss Colquhoun of Sir Percy's innocence, and was very indignant with her brother Wilfred for having the slightest doubt on the subject. Walter shared his sister's confidence in their early friend, which Mrs. Rupert attributed to his being of a more womanly character than his brother, and consequently swayed by instinct rather

than by reason. Mrs. Rupert's sanguine and cheerful temperament made her a great comfort to Sissie, who needed all the comfort she could have when Miss Colquhoun's efforts proved quite unsuccessful, and Mr. Fitch lost all hope of any delay in the trial enabling him to gain further evidence for the defence.

The 28th of June, therefore, was fixed for the decisive day, and the intervening time, dreary as it was in itself, seemed to Sissie to fly with a rapidity which time had never had before. Harriet Colquhoun returned on the 27th, looking haggard and dispirited. The next day, when Mrs. Rupert and Sissie went to the court, to be ready whenever Sissie's evidence might be called for, Harriet, to the surprise of all, refused to accompany them, and remained at the lodging. When the others returned, about three hours later, it seemed, from her appearance, as if her solitary watch had been more trying even

than the agitating scene which Sissie had gone through. Sissie was too much excited to realise that the crisis had come, and that an hour or two more would decide her father's fate.

"Oh, Aunt Harriet!" she exclaimed, almost laughing, as she entered the room, "I very nearly got taken up for contempt of court. I insisted upon saying more than I had any right to say."

"What was that?" asked Miss Colquhoun, quickly.

"What was it, Cousin Maria? What did I say? I forget now," and Sissie looked round the room, and shivered.

"Not many words, Sissie," returned Mrs. Rupert. "She gave her evidence capitally, Harriet; and then, when it was all over, she said, in a low voice, but so perfectly distinct that every one must have heard it, 'Let me say one word, my lord. I did believe my father to be guilty, but now I know that he

is innocent.' There was a general buzz of applause at this, but it was quickly stopped."

"Do you think it was very wrong, Aunt Harriet?" asked Sissie.

"No, dear. Very likely it may do good. Did you hear any of the evidence, Maria?"

"No. But Wilfred came out constantly, and told us how it was going on. Sissie was the last witness called."

"I am very glad they did not want poor little Clement," said Sissie.

"I am rather sorry," returned Miss Colquhoun; "for I think to have called such a child would have told against them. How was the evidence brought forward, Maria?"

"The first part of the time was occupied in proving that Harry Morris was Henry Monk's son. The Dutch lady whom Sissie saw at Heidelberg was one of the witnesses brought to prove that. Wilfred says her evidence made a great sensation. She was very much overcome herself, and some very

touching letters from the boy's mother were read. Sissie, dear, had not you better lie down for a little while? It will be an hour or two before we hear anything, I daresay."

"I will go to my room, Cousin Maria, if you will be sure to let me know directly you have any news."

"Was she much agitated?" asked Miss Colquhoun, as soon as Sissie had left the room.

"She was very pale and cold, but she appeared quite calm. She answered all the questions put to her with perfect readiness and composure. Poor Percy looked most admiringly at her—almost as if he forgot how his cause might be affected by her evidence."

"What is really your impression—or rather, what do you think is Wilfred's impression as to the present aspect of the case?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"I fancy Wilfred thinks very badly of it; but then he has prejudged the matter."

"Did he think that the identity of Harry Morris with Henry Monk's son was proved beyond a doubt?"

"Yes, certainly. I don't think any one can dispute that—though there was a slight discrepancy in the evidence which was called to show that Harry Morris's mother was Henry Monk's wife. Mme. Pfeffer described Marie Blüm as having very light hair; and she even produced a lock of hair, which was exceedingly fair and soft. On the other hand, the witnesses from A—— all declared that Mrs. Morris had rather red hair, and one of them positively denied that the lock of hair produced could ever have been taken from her head."

"Was not that considered a very important flaw in the case?"

"Its importance was diminished, Wilfred

said, by a doctor volunteering the information that some illnesses had the effect of changing the colour of hair. Wilfred himself did not think this discrepancy in the evidence threw any real doubt on the identity of Mrs. Morris with Marie Blüm."

"And after that was established—or supposed to be established—what was the next thing to be proved?"

"Percy's interest in this boy's death. Of course there was no difficulty in making that clear. There were even some tradesmen brought forward to swear to the difficulty he had in paying their bills, and how everything was settled immediately on Sir John's death. Then the letter from Henry Monk was read to show that he knew of the boy's existence. And then witnesses appeared to prove that he was at Clifton on the fatal 1st of August. And the case was finished by three witnesses swearing to his being the man who had taken Harry Morris out that

day. Wilfred says that he heard several persons remark that the evidence against the prisoner was indisputable; and they could not conceive on what grounds the defence could be rested. Here he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Rupert, suddenly, as her brother came along the street; and both ladies waited in silent suspense for Captain Bligh's information.

"The jury have retired," was all he said, till Mrs. Rupert asked anxiously, "How has it gone?"

"Very badly, I think. The only point which told at all was the evidence of one of the doctors at Clifton, who brought forward a day-book to prove that Sir Percy was with him at the very time the other witnesses had sworn to his being at A——."

"Was the time entered in the book?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"Yes. It seems this Dr. Ake was in the habit of noting down the exact time at

which he saw every patient during the day ; and on this 1st of August the entry occurs : '4·30 till 5·15. Payne and a stranger, who refused to give his name, but made various inquiries about a person of the name of Monk. Could give him no information, having never heard the name in Clifton. Found him so agreeable that I offered him a cup of tea, and introduced him to the ladies.' Those were the words, to the best of my recollection. His wife and a daughter swore to Sir Percy as the stranger who took tea with them on the 1st of August, 1850, and were positive that he did not leave their house before a quarter past five. The A—— witnesses were as positive that their man was with Mrs. Morris from four till five, when he went out with the boy. The Payne mentioned in Dr. Ake's day-book is another doctor, living at Clifton in 1850, who also swore to the correctness of the entry, and further accounted for Sir Percy's time for

an hour previous to the time mentioned there."

"Surely such evidence is conclusive in Percy's favour," remarked Mrs. Rupert.

Her brother shook his head. At that moment Sissie entered the room, and looked the question she could not ask.

"It is all right, Sissie," said Mrs. Rupert, cheerfully. "He must be released after what has come out in the defence. Mr. Fitch's *alibi* has been quite successful."

Sissie looked at Wilfred again—as if she thought his sister might be taking too hopeful a view of the case. Captain Bligh was of the same opinion.

"The jury are deliberating now," he said. "We had better neither hope nor despair till their verdict is given. I will go back and wait for that."

Two more hours of ever-increasing suspense, and then Mrs. Rupert, who was watching at the window, cried again, "Here

he is!" and before either of the others had time to inquire of whom she spoke, Sissie was in her father's arms.

Sir Percy's sense of the peril from which he had escaped was shown by exuberantly high spirits. He laughed at his former fears of an unfavourable verdict, mimicked the witnesses, and was altogether more full of boyish fun and nonsense than any one had seen him since the evening when he received the news of Rupert Monk's death. This conduct, natural as it was in a man of his excitable and volatile temperature, jarred upon the feelings of his companions, who could not so quickly throw off the horror which had oppressed them for the last few weeks. Wilfred, who had come back with Sir Percy, was especially ill at ease, and after sitting in perfect silence for about half an hour, he suddenly rose and said to his sister, "I suppose you will not want my escort home, Maria. If not, I shall go to-night."

"We will all go to-night," exclaimed Sir Percy. "We have nothing to wait here for. The place has not such pleasant associations that we should care to remain in it longer than is necessary. At what time is the train?"

"A few minutes after seven; but surely you will not travel till these ladies have had a good night's rest. You forget how little rest there has been for them of late."

Though Wilfred glanced with affectionate interest at Sissie as he spoke, both she and her father detected something in the expression of his face, as well as in the tone of his voice, which neither of them liked. Sir Percy looked steadily at him for a moment, and then said, rather stiffly, "Thank you for rebuking my selfishness. I will not forget the needs of those who have so long sacrificed themselves for me. Shall we start to-morrow, Harriet? or not till the next day?"

"To-night, if you wish it, Percy," returned Miss Colquhoun. "I don't fancy that Sissie will get much rest as long as we remain here."

"What do you say, darling?" Sir Percy then asked Sissie.

"I should like to get home as soon as possible, papa," answered Sissie, trying to speak cheerfully, but unable quite to disguise the sense of weary desolation which was stealing over her again, now that all fears for her father were at an end. The tone, subdued as it was, was not lost upon Sir Percy. He drew his daughter towards him, and kissed her tenderly, as he said, "Then we start to-night. Don't you think so, Maria?"

"Certainly. We shall all rest better at home, and it is nonsense for Wilfred to go flying off by himself."

"As you will be such a strong party for Monk's Kirk, I think I shall run up to

London, instead of going northwards at present," remarked Wilfred, in a very constrained manner. "My train will be more than an hour later than yours, so I shall be able to see you off," he added hastily, as his sister seemed about to remonstrate.

All was now confusion till it was time to start. No one had hitherto imagined the possibility of eating, but whilst the servants packed up, and made the other necessary preparations, a substantial meal was spread, to which Sir Percy, for one, did justice. Mrs. Rupert also found that a sudden relief from great anxiety was a famous whettener of the appetite.

The party reached the station in good time. The ladies had taken their seats before the ringing of the first bell, and Sir Percy was preparing to step in after them, having just received the tickets from his servant, when, on a sudden impulse, he turned to Captain Bligh, and said abruptly,

"Wilfred, tell me honestly. Do you still believe me to be guilty?"

"I do," answered Wilfred, in a low, firm tone.

Sir Percy looked at him with a white face, breathing quickly, but saying nothing. Suddenly he turned away, and walked a few steps along the platform. Sissie, who had heard the rapid question and answer, watched her father in some alarm. She saw Mr. Warren coming quickly up to the train, as if with the intention of entering it. She saw her father approach him, and hold out his hand. Mr. Warren turned hastily aside, with a transparent pretence of unconsciousness, and stepped into a carriage. Instantly Sir Percy walked back. His face was quite changed in the few minutes since she had last seen it. He pushed past Wilfred, with a word or two of formal apology, and came up quickly to the carriage window.

"I am not going by this train," he said,

in a voice which told of violent emotion forcibly repressed. "I shall go to Coverheath. You will take care of Sissie, Harriet?"

"Papa, I shall not go without you!" cried Sissie, and as she spoke she stepped lightly from the carriage, and placed herself beside her father on the platform.

"Tell Minns that we shall not go by this train, Drayton," said Miss Colquhoun to Sir Percy's man, as she also left the carriage.

"Will not you go, Aunt Harriet?" asked Sissie, in surprise.

"No," returned Miss Colquhoun, in a tone which forbade remonstrance.

"Then I suppose I had better go with Maria," said Captain Bligh.

"I suppose so," was Harriet's answer, spoken so sharply, and accompanied by a glance of such indignant scorn, that poor Wilfred quite cowered beneath it, and was

glad to take refuge in one of the vacated seats of the railway carriage.

At that moment the second bell rang and the train began to move. Mrs. Rupert kissed her hand, Captain Bligh lifted his hat, and in another minute they were out of sight, whilst the other three were left standing on the platform, with the servants at a little distance, Mrs. Minns and Sissie's maid still twittering with the excitement of such a sudden change of plan, and Drayton quarrelling with the porters about a portmanteau, which, in spite of his attempts to extricate it, had been carried off in the train.

"Take tickets for East Leighton by the 7.40 up train, Drayton," said Sir Percy, as he moved away, with Sissie leaning on his arm. "You see it is of no use," he added, in a low voice, when they had got beyond the hearing of the servants. "They all believe me to be guilty."

"Not all, papa," said Sissie.

"The only two men I have seen have told me so—the one by words and the other by looks," remarked Sir Percy, gloomily.

"You would not think much of Mr. Warren's opinion in any other case, papa."

"It is a good sample of the world's opinion," returned Sir Percy. "No, Sissie, it is useless to argue the matter. I thought this morning's verdict would have cleared me; but I find it is not so. In the eyes of the world the stain of murder rests upon me still, and I am a proscribed man. I shall never see Monk's Own again, Sissie. I shall bury myself at Cover-heath, 'The world forgetting—by the world forgot.' But there is no reason why you should be buried also. I have done you injury enough, my poor child. Do not let me doom you to perpetual banishment."

"It is no banishment to me to be where you are, papa; and besides, my greatest desire is to spend the rest of my life at

Cover-heath. I never wish to leave it again. We shall both find peace there." As Sissie spoke thus of her future life, a shadow of dreariness seemed to strike a chill into her heart, and she shivered.

" You are cold, darling," said Sir Percy. " Go into the waiting-room. Harriet is there, I see. It will be more than half an hour before our train starts."

Sissie obeyed mechanically, and she was soon seated on a sofa beside Harriet Colquhoun, whilst her father continued to pace up and down the platform.

" I am very sorry for this, Sissie," Harriet began, " but I feared it would be so. It could hardly be otherwise with two such men as Wilfred Bligh and Mr. Warren, and having lighted on those two first, your father naturally believes that they represent the world. A false belief, of course, but as hurtful to him, at present, as if it were true. We must have patience. Time will show

him that all is not lost because William Warren turns his back on him."

Miss Colquhoun paused, but as Sissie did not speak, she continued, "I am coming to stay with you very soon, Sissie."

"Oh, Aunt Harriet, it will be so dull for you!" exclaimed Sissie.

"And what will it be for you, Sissie?"

"It is all the same to me, Aunt Harriet; no place is more dull than another."

"There was a time when I used to say, or rather to think that, Sissie, with the same weary feeling which you have; and now I say that no place is dull—not that all are equally dull, but all are equally full of interest. I have a particular reason for wishing to pay you a long visit at Cover-heath very soon."

"What is that?" asked Sissie, seeing that her companion desired to be questioned.

"You will not think me a conceited old fool when I tell you that there are many people who value my opinion. I need not

now enter into the causes which have brought about such a state of things. I believe you know that it is so. And you know, also, that I cannot leave London at the height of the season without there being some enquiries as to what has become of me. The fact is, I am useful in many ways, and cannot well be spared from certain circles. Now do you understand why I wish to come to you in your desert?"

"I think I do, Aunt Harriet, and I am very grateful."

"There is no reason to be grateful, Sissie," returned Harriet, gravely. "It is a matter of calculation. After my absence has been remarked on one or two occasions where I am generally of use, questions will be asked to which the answer will show that I, for one, am fully persuaded that the verdict given this morning meant 'Not guilty,'—not the Scotch compromise of 'Not proven.'"

"Is that what is thought, Aunt Harriet?"

"That is what Wilfred Bligh thinks, and some others, I believe. But we will set that right, Sissie, when the contrary persuasion has time to work its way. It must have time. You will not refuse to receive me as your guest at Cover-heath."

"No, Aunt Harriet. It is very kind of you to wish to come."

"It is not kind, Sissie," returned Miss Colquhoun, with such a strange break in her voice that Sissie looked at her in surprise —only to be more surprised by the strange emotion visible in her face. "You look upon me as a tough old woman of the world," Harriet continued, "and you are right, for that is what I am. But every one has some vulnerable point, and I am no exception. My heart was not always tough, Sissie. I had my romance once, and it is not quite dead yet. It is for the sake of that old, young romance, that I wish all

the world to know that I, at least, have never doubted Percy Monk."

As Miss Colquhoun finished speaking, a glow, something like the blush of a young girl, spread over her face, and a light shone in her usually dim eyes, which, to one who had known her in her youth, would have smoothed away the wrinkles and crow's feet, and have recalled the Harriet Colquhoun of thirty years ago. It served as a revelation to Sissie, in the sudden surprise of which she involuntarily exclaimed, "But you would not marry him, Aunt Harriet!"

"Would you accept a marriage of convenience in exchange for the dream of a lifetime?" asked Miss Colquhoun, still looking and speaking so unlike herself that Sissie felt quite bewildered. "If he had needed me I would have married him, Sissie. If he needed me I would go to the world's end for him, or with him."

Sissie drew nearer to her companion, and

laid her hand within the other's arm, but she did not speak.

"Now you see the truth of the saying that 'there is no fool like an old fool,'" continued Miss Colquhoun, more in her natural manner. "The truth is, Sissie, whatever may be said of woman's fickleness, if a woman once really lets that mischievous little god of love into her heart, hide, smother, crush him as she may, there he will remain till her heart has ceased to beat. Is it time, Percy? No! you take care of this poor, worn-out child. I am old enough to take care of myself."

CHAPTER XI.

AT first the perfect repose and calm of their life at Cover-heath was delightfully soothing to Sir Percy and his daughter ; but very soon the uninterrupted indulgence in their own sad thoughts began to act most injuriously upon them both. Sissie was the least tempted to yield, without a struggle, to a morbid state of feeling, as she was forced to rouse herself for her father's sake ; whilst Sir Percy, seeing her always cheerful in his presence, ceased to remember that she was as great a sufferer as himself. Day by day he grew more entirely absorbed in the contemplation of his own griefs — at one time blaming himself as having fully merited

the punishment which had fallen upon him —at another time railing against the injustice of the world in condemning him for a crime of which the law had acquitted him. As the weeks passed on, a softer and less selfish regret took possession of his mind, and he became haunted by the thought that, although not the actual murderer of his young cousin, he had virtually caused the boy's untimely death by concealment of the knowledge which would have placed him in his proper position, and thus have saved him and his mother from the perils belonging to their unprotected state.

From these remorseful thoughts Sissie could never for long succeed in diverting her father's mind ; and it was therefore a great relief to her when Miss Colquhoun rejoined their party, bringing with her little Clement, who till then had remained with the Rupert Monks. Though even the influence of his old friend failed to rouse Sir

Percy from his despondency, he could not be quite insensible to the charm of her warm sympathy and ready comprehension of all his varying moods. Before Harriet had been a week at Cover-heath he was beguiled into talk of old times, and soon he grew quite gay whenever his companions could lead his mind back to the scenes of his boyhood, in almost all of which Sissie soon found that Harriet Colquhoun had taken some part. Of what deep interest that part had been to Harriet, Sissie had known since the day she left Gloucester; but she had never suspected that the interest had been mutual, until, one day, when Miss Colquhoun had been called from the room in the midst of an animated flow of early reminiscences, Sir Percy remarked, "Harriet little knows what was on the point of happening at that garden-party."

"What was on the point of happening, papa?"

"At the very moment when that quarrel we were speaking of between Rice and poor Rupert disturbed us, I was beginning to stammer out something which would have ended in asking Harriet to be my wife. I have often thought what a chance that was—if anything is a chance."

"What happened, papa?" asked Sissie, deeply interested herself, and delighted to see that her father was interested also.

"Harriet and I had always been great friends—from the time we were in long clothes, I believe. The summer we were talking of I was a good deal at Monk's Own, and Harriet was then a very charming girl—not pretty, of course, but very clever and extremely elegant. I had always liked her society better than that of any woman I had ever seen, and having nothing else to do just then, I fell in love with her. Her sister Julia was hardly more than a child, but she was very womanly for her age, and most

lovely. Poor Rupert was desperately in love with her, and so was Dick Rice, who was a widower then. At this fête at Kirklands they were both fighting to outdo each other in Julia's eyes, and it ended in their fighting in reality. I was expecting every day to be ordered abroad with my regiment, and I had persuaded myself that I could not leave without declaring my love for Harriet; though I knew that it was as likely as not, that if Harriet herself were willing to listen to me, Mr. Colquhoun would turn me out of the house for my presumption."

"Why?" asked Sissie.

"I had nothing but my pay, and had no chance of ever having anything more, except, perhaps, some trifling legacy from Sir John. Harriet had a good property of her own, independently of what her father might leave her. But on the occasion of this garden-party, champagne and excitement had put all such considerations out of my

head, and, as I said, I was just beginning my declaration, when we were interrupted by a tremendous tumult, and I had to leave Harriet, and to interfere between Rice and my cousin, who were shaking their fists in each other's faces. Rupert was quite beside himself with jealousy, and I dared not lose sight of him again till I had got him back to Monk's Own. Then Sir John begged me to take him away for a time. We went to London, and in two days my orders came to join my regiment at once. A week after the fête at Kirklands, I was on my way to Canada."

"Without seeing Aunt Harriet again?"

"Yes. I had no time to go back into Yorkshire. I dared not write what I had intended to say, for I knew that every possible argument would be urged against me."

"And when you came back, papa?"

"That was not for three years, and then,"

Sir Percy went on quickly, with a heightened colour and an embarrassed manner, “we were first quartered at Portsmouth. I was just thinking of asking for leave to go down into Yorkshire, when I saw your mother at a review. I thought then I need not be in a hurry about leave, and I put off asking till I no longer cared for it. For the next year nothing would have induced me voluntarily to leave Portsmouth; and Sir John was so opposed to my marriage, that after that, there was no question of my visiting Monk's Own.”

“When did you next see Aunt Harriet?” asked Sissie.

“Not for some time after my marriage, just before I was going out to India. She was not like the same person then. Her father's death and Julia's elopement had changed her from a sprightly girl into a middle-aged woman.”

Sissie thought of another blow which had

probably had more to do with this change in Harriet than either her father's death or her sister's elopement, and from that time a reverent tenderness took the place of the somewhat distant admiration and respect with which she had formerly regarded her father's faithful friend.

As the dull autumn days came on, Sir Percy, always peculiarly sensitive to external influences, grew more and more depressed in spirit. Even the remembrance of early days now lost the power of cheering him, and his companions tried in vain every device to rouse him from the mournful reverie in which he was continually absorbed. Sleep and appetite almost entirely forsook him, and every day seemed to make his hair whiter, and his face more aged and careworn. No persuasion could induce him to go beyond the grounds of the cottage, and if he happened to catch sight of any one passing along the road, he would imme-

dately hurry into the house, and remain in his own room for hours.

This conduct was infectious, and Sissie began to feel that it would be impossible for her to endure a meeting with any one from the outer world. She and Harriet went to church at Bucksbridge every Sunday, but they never stopped to speak to those they met on their way, and their few acquaintances in the neighbourhood made no advances towards any intercourse with the secluded family.

It was, therefore, with a mixture of surprise and something like terror, that one day in the beginning of December, Sissie saw three figures advancing up the drive. She had left the house for a little relief from the sight of her father, who had been sitting for hours in the same hopeless attitude—with his arms crossed on his breast and his eyes fixed on the floor. Now she was about hastily to return, when a second glance at

the approaching forms set her heart beating so violently that her legs seemed to fail under her, and she sank on to a garden seat, spreading out her hands before her, and staring in helpless bewilderment at the cause of her agitation. Onward they came, one with a firm, manly tread, and erect bearing; a shorter figure by his side, with a sort of rolling gait; and, some paces behind, a gliding, shuffling form, quite strange to Sissie. The others were not strange. The first of them, at least, was familiar to her as the one object always present to her mind. Surely it was this constant mental presence which was now deceiving her!—It could not be——They were close to her now—she heard their voices—*his* voice! Sissie sprang to her feet. She did not say a word, but as Arnold held out his hand, she seized it in both hers, and stood gazing into his face, with all the past months' of hopeless misery showing

in her weary, hollow eyes, and thin, pale cheeks.

“Sissie! How you have suffered!” were Arnold’s first words. “But it will soon be all right now.”

“It *is* all right now,” said Sissie, never for a moment relaxing her hungry, wistful gaze into his face.

“How?” asked Arnold. “How has it been set all right?”

“You are here,” was Sissie’s answer.

“Sissie, what does this mean? Has it come at last? Oh! my Susse! Have you learnt to love me after all?”

“*Learnt* to love you, Arnold?” was all Sissie said, but it was enough to make Arnold disengage his hand, and throwing his arm round her, draw her to him, and kiss her passionately again and again. Sissie offered no resistance, but when he at last relaxed the closeness of his embrace, she leant her head upon his shoulder and

cried quietly, for the first time for many months.

"My darling!" said Arnold, after a few minutes' silence. "I have learnt to bear trouble something like a man, but such happiness as this makes a baby of me."

Sissie's only response was again to take the hand which lay on her shoulder, and to hold it between both her own.

"Poor Arnold!" she said, after a silence, during which she had observed that the arm with which Arnold held her was the only one he had. "The other hand has been given for me — the hand nearest your heart!"

"Do you remember that?" cried Arnold, joyfully.

"Was I likely to forget it? I have never forgotten anything you said then."

"You did not love me then, Sissie?"

"Did I not?"

"Did you?"

Sissie laid her cheek upon the hand she held.

“ You loved me then, and yet you let me go away broken-hearted ! ”

“ What could I do, Arnold ? ”

“ Why ? What was there to come between us, if you loved me ? ”

“ Do you not know ? Have you not heard ? ”

“ *Do I know ? Was it that ? Oh ! Sissie, what a blind fool I have been !* ”

“ Perhaps now you will allow me to speak to my sister ? ” said a gruff, and yet boyish voice, which, for the first time, reminded Sissie of the second figure she had seen, and disengaging herself from Arnold, she turned and recognised her brother Herbert.

“ If it had been any one but the man that has a right to everything of mine, I should have stopped this long ago,” said Herbert, as he kissed his sister, in the shy, awkward

manner which some boys put into every expression of natural feeling.

"How is Sir Percy?" asked Arnold.

"He is pretty well in health, but—you know—you said you knew—" replied Sissie.

"I know that a most preposterous and impossible charge has been brought against him."

"Then you don't believe it!" cried Sissie, joyfully.

"Believe it!" echoed Arnold, with a laugh, which grated upon Sissie's ear as somewhat unfeeling, and which was followed by the, in her opinion, irrelevant question, "Don't I believe that I am alive?"

"There is my father," remarked Herbert, and both the young men started at the sight of the bowed, grey-haired man who came towards them. Herbert hurried forward and held out his hand. "I am very sorry I ran away, father," he said, bashfully. "I came home directly I heard you were in trouble."

"Welcome home, my boy, at any rate," said Sir Percy, in his now habitually sad voice; and he took his son's hand, but released it instantly, with a deep sigh.

"Welcome me home, too, Sir Percy," said Arnold.

"Arnold Preston!" cried Sir Percy, now, at last, a little roused out of his mournful apathy. "Heaven be praised that you are safe! No, no!" he added, hastily, as Arnold held out his hand. "Not that. You do not know. You must not shake hands with me. If you ask any one, they will tell you that my hand is stained with the blood of a poor helpless child, whose father had confided him to my care."

Sissie went to her father's side as he spoke, and put her arm through his.

"And if any one told me that," cried Arnold, still holding out his hand, "I should say to them, 'What you tell me is simply impossible—it is morally impossible

that Sir Percy Monk should have been capable of the base and cruel act you charge him with; and it is physically impossible, because the child whom you accuse him of having murdered is alive, and I am he!"

Sir Percy started back in amazement, whilst Sissie exclaimed, "Arnold!"

"I can explain in a very few words," continued Arnold, still speaking in the same rapid and excited manner. "My father, Henry Maurice Monk, was married to my mother, Marie Blüm, at the Hague, on the 4th of March, 1832. I have a copy of the register here," drawing some papers out of his pocket. "They came to England soon after their marriage, and settled at Clifton, a little village in Buckinghamshire—" Sissie uttered an exclamation here. Arnold continued, "where I was born. I have also a copy of the register of my birth and baptism. When I was five years old, my father died, at Yarmouth, where we had gone for a little

sea air. My mother was beside herself with grief, and the landlady of our lodging took us back at once to Clifton, the only place in England where we had any friends. My mother was ill—in fact, hardly herself for many months, and then we went to live at Bedford, where, about four years later, she married Mr. Preston, my dear, kind, second father. That is all. It is very simple. All the mistake has arisen from a confusion between two Cliftons."

"How long have you known this?" asked Sir Percy, very slowly, like a man speaking in a dream.

"Since I was with you in Norfolk. I then went to Yarmouth, to see my father's grave, and, to my surprise and horror, saw that the name of Monk had been added to the Henry Maurice which I sought."

"You did not know your father's real name?"

"No. My first idea was that my poor

mother had been deceived, and the marriage was not a legal one. With that idea I asked your leave to go to Holland, where to my relief I found that my father had had his full name inscribed in the marriage register, although he was known to my mother, and to all his friends abroad, as Henry Maurice only."

"And you did not tell me this when you met me so soon after," said Sissie, reproachfully.

"When I had satisfied myself of the legality of the marriage," continued Arnold, "my only thought was pride in being able to claim relationship with you; but when I met Mr. Rice at Wiesbaden, I learnt from him that if Henry Monk had left a son, that son might claim Monk's Own. I could not then say anything of what I knew, until you had answered the question I asked you on the Rhine."

"And when I did answer it?" asked Sissie, hanging her head.

"I could not take your home from you, when you would not come to mine."

"You are a noble fellow, Arnold!" cried Sir Percy.

"I left the papers of which these are copies with my father's lawyer, so that in case of my death, the truth might be known. Of course, in that case, it would have been all right,—I mean your holding Monk's Own. I never thought any mischief could result from my concealment of my own identity. When we got some English papers in which it was all discussed, Herbert and I started home at once. I have all the necessary proofs, so I shall soon be able to disprove the calumny. But first, before I take steps to oust you from your home, I want something else from you—I will not have a home without a wife; will you give me a wife?"

"Can I refuse you anything?" returned Sir Percy. "Do I not owe to you the lives

of at least two of my sons ; and have you not now given me more than life ?”

“ I will not have my wife on those terms ! ” cried Arnold. “ I will have no bargaining for her. She must come to me of her own free will. Once, twice, thrice she has refused me, and each time given me a deeper wound ; now she must offer herself to me. Will she ? ” The last words were said in a tone, and with a look which Sissie could not resist. She left her father’s arm, and placed her hand within Arnold’s.

“ Now you will shake hands ? ” said Arnold to Sir Percy.

“ No, no ! ” cried Sir Percy, drawing back again. “ You do not know yet. My hand is free from blood, but not from treachery. Your father asked me to see his child righted, and I kept back my knowledge of that child’s existence, and usurped the place that was his right,—your right.”

“ You did me more good than harm,”

returned Arnold, quickly. "If I had known of my rights when my grandfather died, when I was a boy of seventeen, with no thought beyond my own gratification, I and Monk's Own should have both gone to the dogs. I have learnt many lessons since then, a great many from yourself as to there being duties attached to property, as well as rights ; and more from another person," looking with a smile at Sissie, " who has worried me out of all my tendency to self-indulgence. If I had had Monk's Own six years ago, I should never have got the wife without whom I should not care to have it. Prosperity would never have won her, would it, Sissie ? It is owing to my griefs that I am now the happiest man that ever lived. Make it perfect, sir ; give me your hand."

" Touching such a hand as yours ought to go far to make mine clean, my boy," said Sir Percy, with deep emotion, as he grasped Arnold's hand.

" You and Sissie both look as if you had been in purgatory," remarked Arnold.

" And you—have *you* had no sufferings ?" asked Sir Percy, with a glance at Arnold's left side.

" Nothing to compare with yours ; for mine have been only physical sufferings, not worth speaking of."

" Not worth speaking of, he calls them, father," cried Herbert, " and for three months we expected every day would be his last ; and when there began to be some hope of him, he was in such pain that he fainted every time he moved."

" That is all over now," said Arnold, " and I am as well as ever, you see. But one thing I must tell you. This boy, who looks, and is, so rough and hard, was the tenderest nurse to me that any man could have. He and Joe here," turning to the third figure, whom Sissie now perceived to be a black man, " saved my life between them."

"Well, a fellow had need to do all he could for a fellow that hadn't thought anything of letting himself be chopped up for one," returned Herbert, with a good deal of feeling and very little grammar."

At that moment little Clement came timidly out of the house. He no sooner caught sight of Arnold, than with an inarticulate shriek of joy, he sprang on to his friend's neck, and covered his face with passionate kisses.

"Do Mr. and Mrs. Preston know?" asked Sissie, after the silence, which had been caused by Clement's rapturous demonstrations.

"Not that I have come home," answered Arnold, still holding the boy to him. "We only reached Liverpool yesterday morning. We went first to Monk's Own, where we learnt that you were here, and that my father and mother had left Dorlington, so we came on here at once."

"But they know that—that——" Sissie

could not say, "that you are alive," she hardly dared to *think* that yet.

"What, Sissie?" asked Arnold, meeting her enquiring gaze with the old look which had been before her eyes all these weary months, when she had never hoped again to bask in its loving glow.

"Oh, Arnold, is it true?" she cried, again laying her hand timidly upon his arm.

"Is what true?" asked Arnold, looking utterly mystified.

"Poor child!" explained Sir Percy. "She cannot believe it yet. She means is it true that you are alive."

"That I am alive! Did you not know that? Did you think I was a ghost, Sissie, as I came up the drive?"

Sissie only clasped his arm tighter, and looked more wistfully into his face.

"I have written home twice since I got well enough to write. Surely they have got my letters."

"I should have heard if they had," returned Sissie. "Oh, Arnold, I had to tell them."

"That I had been hurt?"

"That you were dead," said Sir Percy.
"That was what we heard."

"I never wrote that, father!" cried Herbert.

"No, but Hughes said so. He said that you had been seen digging his grave."

"His grave! Oh, I know; it must have been when Joe and I buried——"

"Never mind!" cried Arnold hastily, with a glance at Sissie. "I know. Yes, I have no doubt it was that."

"But you promised to write again if he lived," said Sir Percy to his son.

"Did I. I must have forgotten all about it then. We had enough to do to keep him alive, without writing letters."

"Then those poor dear people heard that I was dead! And you had to tell them,

Sissie! What a trial it must have been to you!" As Arnold spoke he set Clement down, and led Sissie a little apart from the others.

"It was not that," returned Sissie, in a low voice. "Your mother comforted me. I did not realize it myself till I told them." Sissie shuddered at the remembrance of the little parlour, and the noisy canary.

"Sissie!" exclaimed Arnold, "it is my turn now to say, 'Is it true?' I came home prepared to see you once more, perhaps, and then, never again; for I was determined to go back to Australia as soon as I had cleared your father. And now you tell me that I need not have gone away at all. Do you really tell me that, Sissie? Do you really mean that I was not a fool to fancy that you were beginning to care for me when we were together on the Rhine?"

"I was not *beginning* to care for you then, Arnold. I began to care for you long before that," returned Sissie, with the grave and

simple frankness which had always been one of her chief charms in Arnold's eyes.

There was only time for a look in answer, for Sir Percy called out, "Arnold, here is another friend of yours. Harriet, let me introduce to you Sir Arnold Monk."

The joyous tone of these words was as great a surprise to Miss Colquhoun as the words themselves; but she was not one to be long under the influence of surprise. A quick glance at Sir Percy, and another at Arnold, had told her almost all there was to tell, before she said, "I must confess to more pleasure in making Sir Arnold Monk's acquaintance, even than in welcoming Mr. Arnold Preston back in safety."

"What, you wise woman!" cried Sir Percy. "Do you understand it all at once, without any explanation?"

"I am ashamed of myself for not having understood it all long ago. Where were our sight and hearing, when we failed to know

that those eyes and that voice could belong to no one but a Monk?"

"Well, Harriet, I must do you the justice to say that you have all along doubted the story of Arnold Preston's death, and refused to believe in the identity of Harry Morris with Henry Monk's son. After all, the wise woman was right—hurrah for the wise woman!"

As usual, whether in depression or exaltation, Sir Percy's spirits carried him to a point which was painful to most of his companions. Harriet alone could give him entire sympathy; and, seeing the discomfort of the others, she soon drew him aside, under pretence of learning from him all the particulars of Arnold's history. Arnold himself had no thoughts to spare for such dull matters as heirship and property. He had suddenly found himself in possession of what he had so long coveted in vain, and to be Monk of Monk's Own was of very second-

ary importance in his eyes. To Sissie all this had come so suddenly that she could hardly yet feel sure of her own great happiness. Arnold was alive—was here—and her father was cleared; but yet she felt more inclined to cry than to laugh, as she heard her father laughing, or even to rejoice, as she saw that Harriet was rejoicing. A few earnest words from Arnold did much to turn this troubled excitement into calm happiness.

“Sissie,” he said, leading her towards the black boy, who was shyly standing at some distance, “above all *men* I owe my life to Joe. And I owe him more than life. When I was thought by all, myself included, to be dying, I heard Joe praying for me in words which I hope I never shall forget. ‘Oh, white man’s God, let poor Joe make white man live. But if he no live, take him where good white men go.’ Will you thank Joe for me for this prayer, and for all

besides that he has taught me? And, my only love," he added, in a very low voice, "will you thank the white man's God for having given me not only life, but all that could make my life worth having? Joe"—to the black boy—"this is to be my wife, and she has come to thank you for having saved me for her."

Sissie could not speak, but she pressed the boy's hand, and felt the weight rise from off her heart, and leave her happier than she had ever been before.

CHAPTER XII.

SISSIE felt as if the last six years had been one long, troubled dream, when early the following morning Phœbe entered her room with the words, “I am to tell you that ‘Captain Monk’ and Sir Arnold are going to London by the first train, miss.”

Sissie was already dressed. She had lain awake all night—too happy to feel any desire to sleep; but with the cold, grey light of morning came a doubt of the reality of such happiness, and she rose at once that she might lose no time in gaining the assurance she needed. Phœbe’s message sent her quickly to the door of her father’s room, from whence emerged, in answer to her

summons, a radiant face covered with soap-suds

"Dear old Captain Monk!" cried Sissie; "I am so glad he has come back. I never loved Sir Percy half —" Before she could finish her sentence another radiant face was covered with soap-suds, the discomfort of which had to be endured as best it might, whilst Captain Monk calmly proceeded with his shaving, saying as he did so, "Not a word against Sir Percy. I had rather a respect for him, though I grant you that he was a great scoundrel. Peace be to his ashes. There is Arnold in the garden. Go and show him how his future wife looks during the progress of her toilette."

"I will go and show Aunt Harriet how I have been treated by one of her 'courteous Monks,' replied Sissie, leaving the room with a merry laugh on her soapy face.

"Sissie, come here!" said Arnold, imperi-

ously, standing at the open garden-door, as Sissie came down the stairs a few minutes later. Sissie meekly obeyed.

"It isn't 'sister's love' now, is it?" he asked, looking searchingly at her.

"No," answered Sissie, mischievously. "It is a cousin's love now, of course."

"That is worse!" cried Arnold, with a dissatisfied grimace. "I have been haunted all night by that line, 'Ritter, treue Schwester-liebe —' You must say something kind, Sissie, to take the sound of it out of my ears."

"I thought you had more faith, Arnold," said Sissie, steadily returning his earnest gaze.

"I was seized with a panic in the night," Arnold answered, apologetically. "All that happened yesterday seemed too good to be true. But the doubt is gone now, Sissie," he added, tenderly; "it is impossible to look in your face and doubt you, my Susse."

"I had the same doubt, Arnold," said Sissie. "Not of you—I never doubt you—but a doubt that what happened yesterday was too good to be true. You are a very substantial phantom, however, so perhaps we had better go in to breakfast."

When the gentlemen had started, with the intention of being away till late at night, Sissie congratulated herself that she should have plenty of quiet time to get accustomed to the novel aspect of her life. She was disappointed, however. As her father and Arnold drove out at the gate, the groom who always fetched the post-bag, rode in, bringing fresh excitement in the following letter from Mme. Pfeffer, which had been forwarded from Monk's Own.

"Wiesbaden, December 1st.

"MY DEAR MISS,

"When I returned back to my home after my so sad journey to your country, my

heart was heavy with grief to have been concerned in bringing a great trouble upon you. I thought not that I should soon be able to lighten your trouble. That do I now with hearty pleasure.

"Amongst our very good friends is a doctor at this place, of the name of Doctor Schmidt. Since some weeks he came to us to make a visit, and he heard with much interest of my so unwilling journey to England. First since two days my husband has got a letter from him, in which he begged that we immediately would here come. Here we find a poor sick gentleman, to whom the good doctor had, as a little diversion, recounted of my journey, and of its cause. The gentleman is an Englishman, of the name of Atkins. He, for the sake of his health, to this place in the summer came, but in the winter he is too ill to leave, and Doctor Schmidt says that he never alive will leave. I write English with so great

difficulty, and I so little understand what this poor Herr Atkins have write, that I will not more about it say. One thing I understand quite well, and that is that my dear Marie is not in that dull little church-yard buried, and that your good father did not do nothing to the little boy.

"I would have liked to see you, my dear miss, when I was in your country ; but when I did arrive, they told me 'No,' and when they said 'Yes,' you was gone away. Some day I will come again to see my Marie, and then I will see you, and your so pretty little brother.

"With hearty good wishes, I subscribe myself,

"My dear miss,

"Your sincere friend,

"WILHELMINA PFEFFER."

Enclosed was a legal-looking document, witnessed by an English clergyman, by

Doctor Schmidt, and by Professor Pfeffer.
It was couched in the following terms :

"I, Edward Atkins, being of sound mind, hereby attest that on the 1st of August, 1850, I visited my sister, Maria Morris, in a lodging at the village of A—— near Bristol ; that I took her son Harry for a walk with me, and that, in the course of that walk, the said Harry Morris fell into the river Avon, and was drowned. The cause of my not returning to A—— was that I feared to tell my sister of the death of her child. My sister's marriage to the father of this boy had been against the wishes of all her family, all of whom had consequently refused to have any intercourse with her. I was in Ceylon at the time of her marriage, and did not visit England till the summer of 1850. When on the point of returning to Ceylon, I went to see my sister, as before stated. The boy Harry was imbecile, and when walking with me on the bank of the river,

he became violent in his efforts to get from me a chain, which I had mentioned that I intended to give his mother. In the struggle the boy's foot slipped, and he fell into the river. Never having learnt to swim, I could not attempt to rescue him myself, and there was no help at hand. I sailed the next day for Ceylon, where I remained until this year. I never heard of my sister's death, and I never thought of the possibility of any one being accused of the murder of the boy. Hearing that an innocent person has been accused, I, here, in the presence of these witnesses, and with the knowledge that I have not many months to live, certify that I alone was in any measure the cause of Harry Morris's death.

(“Signed”) “EDWARD ATKINS.”

“I am glad that mystery is cleared off,” said Miss Colquhoun, “although our interest in Madame Pfeffer's discovery is wonderfully diminished since yesterday.”

"How strange it is," said Sissie, "that after poor papa has lain under this cruel suspicion all these weary months, he should be cleared in two ways at once!"

"Some men would never have recovered from such a trial," remarked Harriet. "But he has recovered already. What a beaming face he has had since Arnold's disclosure!"

"Since he got rid of 'Sir Percy!'" added Sissie. "He will be quite happy now that he is Captain Monk again."

"But, Sissie," began Harriet, with a good deal of hesitation, and looking on the ground as she spoke, "it is a matter for serious consideration how he is to live as Captain Monk. He can hardly go into active service again, and his half-pay will never suffice for his support."

Sissie looked astounded. It had never occurred to her that, by the discovery which had restored his peace of mind, her father had been reduced to greater poverty than

that from which his unlawful succession to Monk's Own had relieved him.

"Arnold will have plenty for us all," she said, after a few minutes' pause. "He will never let papa feel the change in his position."

"He will not, of course, allow your father to make up the arrears which have become due to him during the last six years. Indeed, he told me last night that he did not consider Kirklands as part of the Monk's Own estate, but as Sir Percy's private property. Legally, it certainly *is* part of the Monk's Own estate, having been purchased with funds arising from that estate, and I don't think your father will be induced to regard it otherwise, as I told Arnold."

"How did Arnold happen to speak to you about it, Aunt Harriet?"

"After you had gone up-stairs, I remained little while listening to Herbert's plans for future, and when I was going, Arnold

stopped me for a moment in the hall, whilst he was lighting my candle, to tell me how much he had been shocked to hear from Mr. Rice of his father's conduct to Julia, which he feared had been the cause of her marriage with Alfred Hughes. 'If Kirkland's were mine,' he said, 'I should feel that I could do no less than restore it to your sister. As a child I passionately loved my father, and as I cannot defend his conduct, I should like to make some little amends for it. But I don't consider that Kirklands *is* mine.' And then we discussed the question of whether your father could be persuaded to consider Kirklands as his. But you may be sure that what he has already had, and cannot well restore, is all Percy will accept from Arnold, in fact it is all any gentleman *could* accept, under the circumstances. This property is becoming more valuable every year, but in two years Edmund will be of age, and it then becomes

his. If he should continue as well as he is now, he will probably marry——

“Lottie, I suppose,” put in Sissie, laughing.

“Yes,” continued Miss Colquhoun. “And even though he should turn out a great poet, as Arnold predicts, it will be a nice thing for him to have this little independence; “but there will be only enough for him. Herbert seems likely to make his way in the world. He was talking very grandly last night of his plans, and he has evidently no intention of remaining in England. But Sissie, however we look at it, there is nothing for your father but his half-pay, unless——”

“Unless what, Aunt Harriet?” asked Sissie, as Miss Colquhoun hesitated.

“Unless he will let me withdraw my refusal to marry him, and will share my superabundance.”

“Oh, Aunt Harriet! Do you still care for him then?”

"I am forty-eight, Sissie, and at forty-eight we do not *care* as we do at eighteen, or even at twenty-eight. Percy Monk can no longer make my heart beat fast by a look or a word, but my one object in life has been, and always will be, his comfort and happiness ; and if I could by any means increase his comfort—we will not speak of happiness—I should feel that my life had not been wasted." Harriet's eyes filled with tears as she spoke, and Sissie also was much moved.

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a telegram for Arnold, from a man at Dorlington, whom he had commissioned to find out the present address of Mr. and Mrs. Preston. The information which it contained, that Arnold's mother and her husband were within easy reach of Cover-heath, at Mr. Preston's birth-place, a village called Rookham, put an end to all chance of quiet conversation, for that day at least.

"I will telegraph this on to Arnold at once," said Sissie. "It will be in time to find him at Mr. Hadden's office. And I think I had better go over to Rookham to-day, and tell him to meet me there. The drive will not take more than an hour and a half, and it will be best for me to break the news quietly to them, as Mr. Preston has been so ill."

Sissie's resolves were always carried out as soon as formed, and whilst she had been speaking she had written the words for the telegram to Arnold, to send back to East Leighton by the messenger who had come from thence. In less than an hour she and Harriet were on their way to Rookham.

On reaching the village, Miss Colquhoun remained at the inn, whilst Sissie went in search of her friends, whom she found, without any difficulty, in a tiny but very clean lodging. When the door, which led at once into the one sitting-room, was opened

by Mr. Preston. Sissie was shocked at the change in his appearance since she last saw him—then a hearty, ruddy, stout man—now thin, gaunt, and hollow-eyed. Mrs. Preston, also, was much altered. Her pretty fair hair was now plentifully streaked with white, and her formerly smooth face was drawn and lined with the marks which grief, however submissively or heroically met, never fails to leave upon his victims. Both husband and wife received Sissie with the warmest demonstrations of pleasure, and she was soon seated between them, trying hard not to betray her happy news before they were prepared for such a surprise. Suddenly, whilst listening to the account of Mr. Preston's long illness, and of his fancy that only his native air would restore his health, a bright thought occurred to her, and acting upon it as soon as there was a pause, she entered into the history of the charge against her father, of which the

Prestons had heard only the most vague rumours. At first Sissie only gave a slight sketch of the accusation, mentioning no names, but dwelling very particularly on the unexpected arrival of the man supposed to be murdered.

"And he is really the heir to Monk's Own?" asked Mrs. Preston. "I am glad Sir Percy has been cleared from such an unjust charge, but I do not like to think of you all as dissociated from Monk's Own."

"I don't think you will mind it when you know the new owner," said Sissie, unable to repress a smile as she spoke. "Papa will have a very worthy successor."

"Have you known him long?" asked Mrs. Preston.

"For some years," answered Sissie, becoming embarrassed.

"I thought you said you had not known there was such a person till last night,"

remarked Mr. Preston, whose shrewdness was never at fault.

"We knew him before, under another name," returned Sissie, growing still more confused. She felt that she could not keep her secret much longer, and she knew, also, that Arnold might now be expected to arrive, so she hastened towards a disclosure.

"One of the witnesses called on papa's trial was a friend of yours, Mrs. Preston—Mme. Pfeffer, formerly Wilhelmina Vanderkerk."

"Mina!" cried Mrs. Preston, eagerly. "Have you seen her? Where is she? She was my dearest friend!"

"I have not seen her lately; we did not meet at the time of the trial. But I hope she will soon come to England again. She lives at Heidelberg."

"How I should like to see her!" exclaimed Mrs. Preston. "We have often talked of

her, have we not, John? But it would be a sad meeting now."

The tears which filled Mrs. Preston's eyes were too much for Sissie, and she said, hastily, "You must not cry now, dearest Mrs. Preston, I have good news to tell you."

"Good news!" repeated Mr. Preston, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes. But be patient for a minute. There was another person concerned in the trial whom you know, also, Mrs. Preston—Mr. Alfred Hughes."

"Alfred Hughes! Yes, I knew him. But I have not seen him for years. He was my poor Henry's friend, John."

"Yes, I remember," returned Mr. Preston, speaking with a strange eagerness, and keeping his eyes fixed on Sissie. "But this trial—how was he connected with it?"

"He got it up. He first suspected papa. The boy whom papa was accused of murdering was called Harry Morris."

"Morris!" exclaimed Mr. Preston, glancing for a moment at his wife, but immediately resuming his earnest gaze at Sissie.

"I do not understand," said Mrs. Preston, calmly, but growing rather pale. "Who was this Harry Morris?"

"It was all a mistake about him," said Sissie, speaking fast now, and with a beating heart, for she felt that delay was no longer possible. "But the mistake arose from papa's second cousin—the younger son of old Sir John Monk—having been in the habit of sometimes dropping his real surname, and only being called by his two Christian names—Henry Maurice. It was *his* son that papa was supposed to have killed. But his son is alive."

"*His* son," repeated Mrs. Preston, now quite pale.

"Yes," continued Sissie, rapidly. "He married a lady named Marie Blüm, and

their son is the present inheritor of Monk's Own."

"They had only one son," faltered Mr. Preston, whilst his wife said nothing, excepting with her wistful eyes.

"Yes, dearest Mrs. Preston," exclaimed Sissie, unable any longer to keep back the truth. "You must try to bear joy as well as you bore sorrow. He *is* alive! He is safe!"

"Arnold?" gasped the mother.

"Yes. Arnold. He is in England. I have seen him. He is coming here."

"Thank God!" cried Mr. Preston, and then he kissed his wife, and then he kissed Sissie, and then he sat down and burst into a fit of violent sobbing. Mrs. Preston having whispered "Thank God" after her husband, remained perfectly quiet and silent until Sissie, catching sight of Arnold walking irresolutely to and fro on the opposite side of the road, asked, "May I let him in?"

Then Mrs. Preston rose and went to the door. The moment she opened it she was clasped against Arnold's broad chest, and Mr. Preston, sobbing and laughing at the same time, was making ineffectual efforts to embrace them both.

"The next time you enact such an interesting family tableau, good people, I would advise you to shut the door," said Sir Percy, looking in from the road. "Come, Sissie; Harriet and I and the boys are going for a walk. We shall expect you all to dine with us at our inn at seven, Preston."

By dinner-time all the party had regained some little composure, and with the help of Sir Percy's high spirits, and Miss Colquhoun's never-failing conversational powers, the entertainment proved a great success. Without these helps the party might have been a happy—but it would not have been a merry one, for Mr. Preston cried as much as he laughed; Mrs. Preston never spoke, only

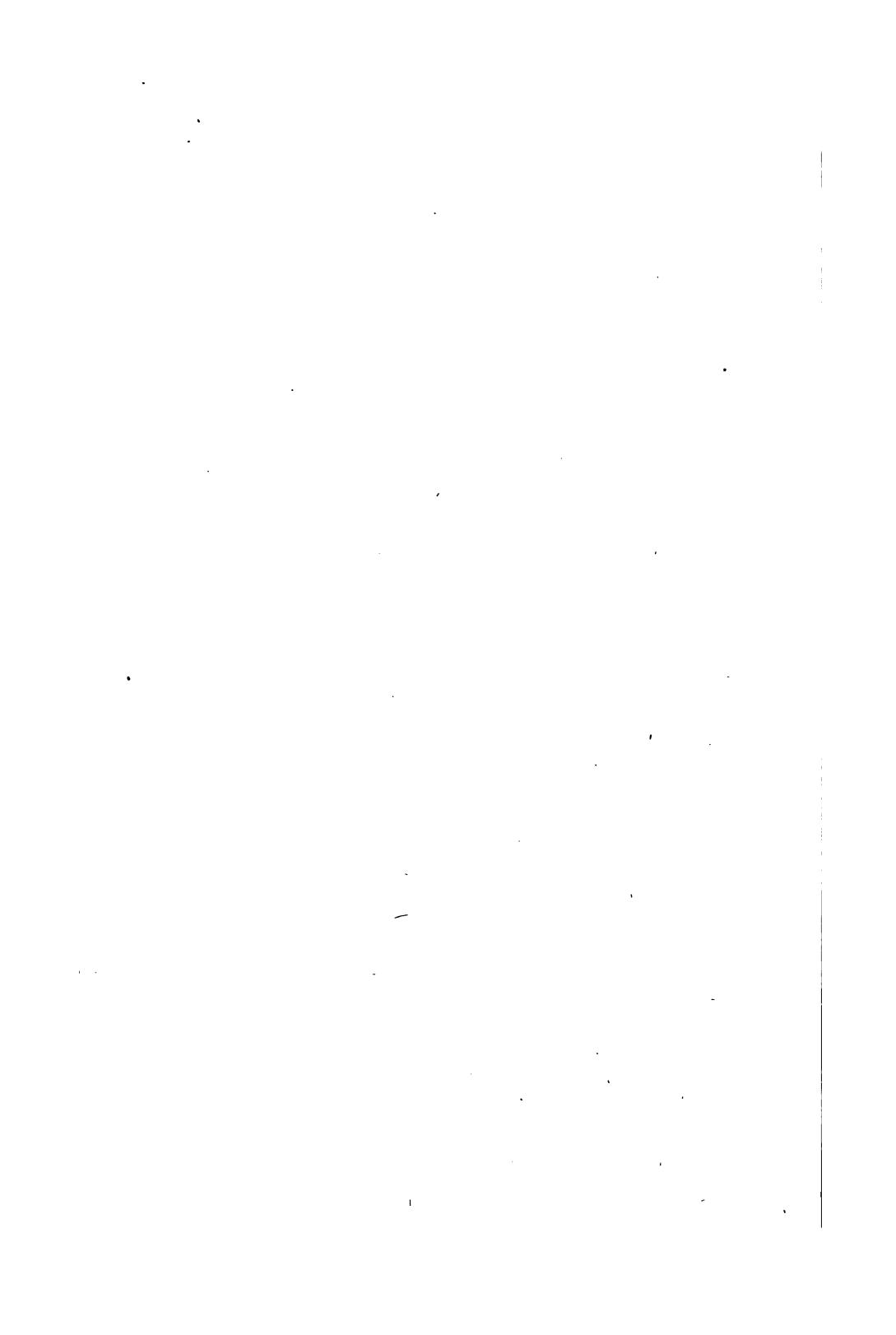
looked at her newly-recovered son ; and both Arnold and Sissie had an uncomfortable tendency to forget what they had to say whilst speaking, and to forget what was said to them whilst listening. In the midst of one of the pauses consequent on this embarrassing behaviour, Sir Percy suddenly rose, and, with great ceremony, announced that Captain Monk would have the honour of proposing the toast of the evening. Having thus introduced himself, he proceeded, partly in a bantering tone, and partly with affecting earnestness, to pass a short and just panegyric on Arnold, finishing with the words, “Let me beg you to drink, with all the honours, the health of the only man worthy of the wife he has chosen, the only man to whom I could with perfect confidence have entrusted the daughter of whom he has robbed me—Sir Arnold Monk of Monk's Own !”

“And what shall I do without my

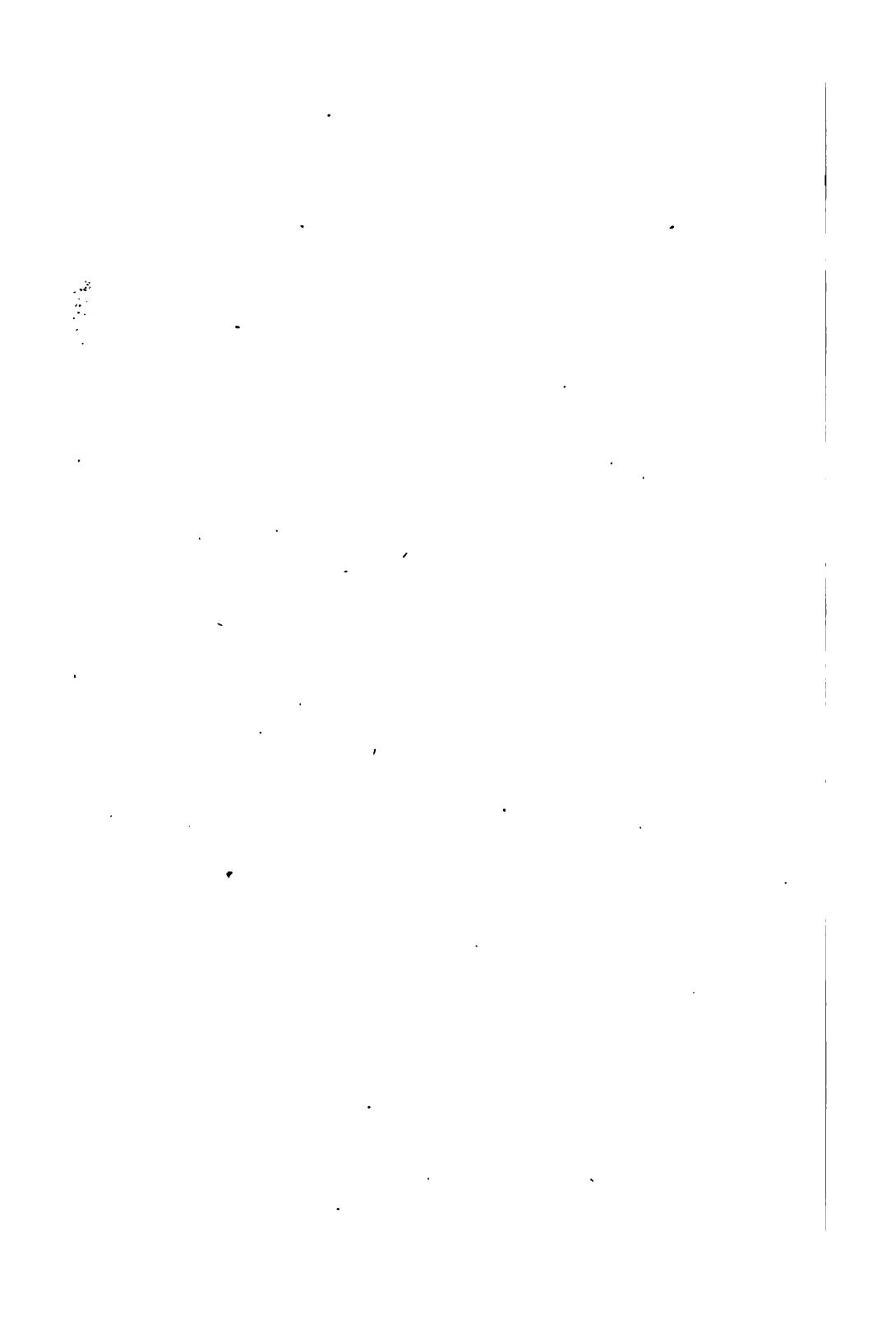
daughter?" asked Captain Monk of Sissie, whilst the toast was being drunk with uproarious enthusiasm, the uproar being principally due to Herbert and Clement.

"Ask Aunt Harriet," replied Sissie, in the same low tone, secure that no one but her father would hear her words amidst the deafening shouts of "Monk of Monk's Own."

THE END.



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